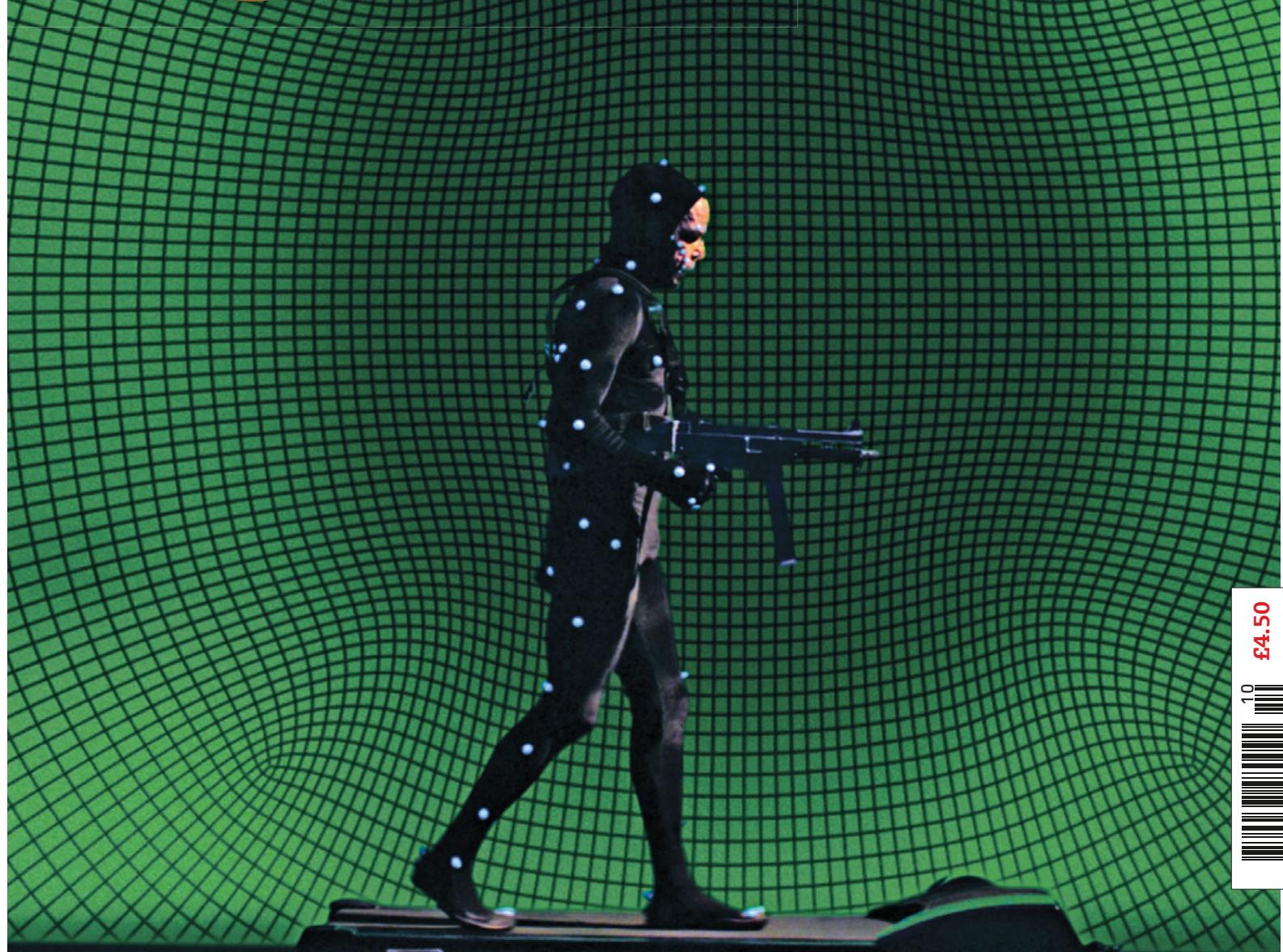


THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



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**Chris Marker** Remembering the life and work of a visionary  
**Lawless** Nick Cave and John Hillcoat's moonshine thriller  
**Christian Petzold's** 'Barbara'  
**David Thomson** in conversation with Greil Marcus  
**Dredd** Alex Garland on bringing the world of 2000AD to the screen



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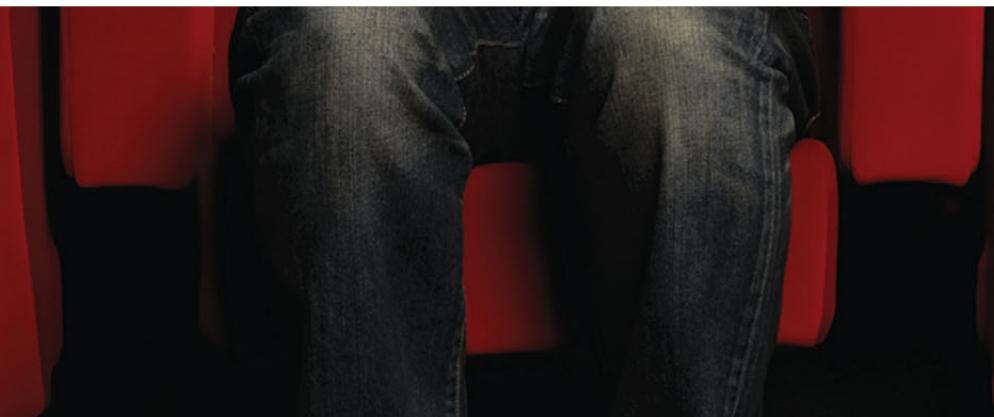
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# Welcome



Chris Marker (left), who died on 29 July, very seldom allowed himself to be photographed. So this shot of the great filmmaker as a young man, with his friend Alain Resnais, is all the more touching. Like Resnais (the younger of the pair, having only just turned 90 this summer), Marker kept working into his tenth decade. But while Resnais's later work has looked back to that most venerable of arts, the theatre, Marker kept moving on, embracing digital technology in all its forms – and inspiring filmmakers around the world,

ten of whom reflect on his legacy (p.40). Also taking the long view on the possibilities of cinema is the critic David Thomson, the subject of the first in our new series 'The *Sight & Sound* Interview' (p.52). And in case Leos Carax (p.26 & p.66) and Christian Petzold (p.48) seem to weight the balance towards European arthouse, we've thrown in a red-blooded dose of pulp courtesy of *Dredd* (p.32) and a brief history of that undervalued genre, the bootlegger movie (p.36). A potent brew indeed. **Nick James**

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- 'Once Upon a Time...*Les Enfants du Paradis*' (52 mins)
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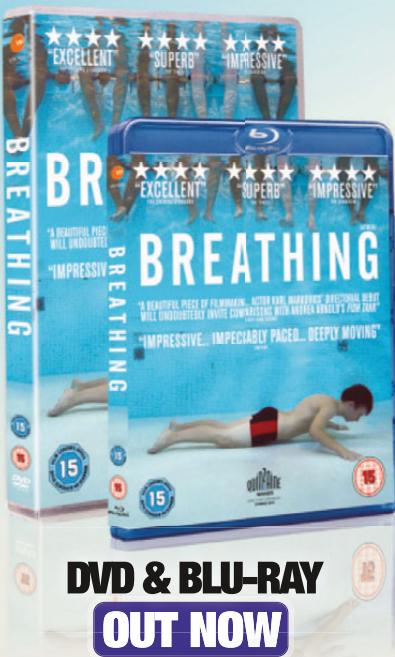
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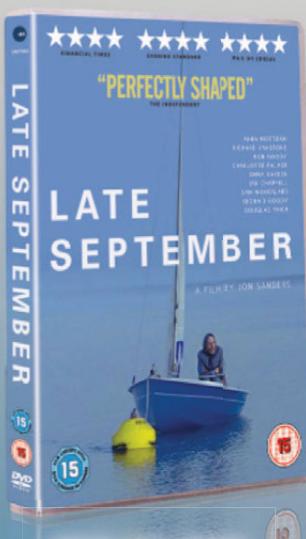


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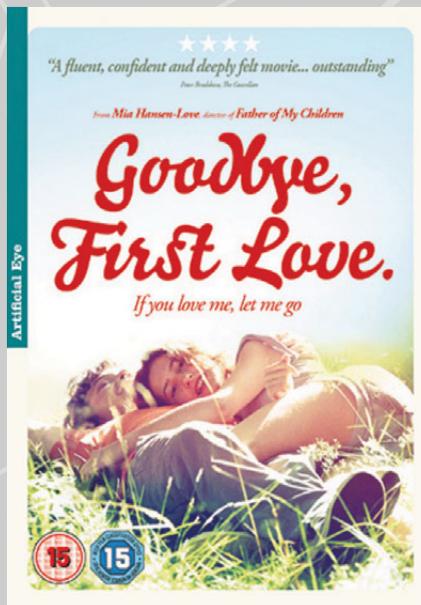
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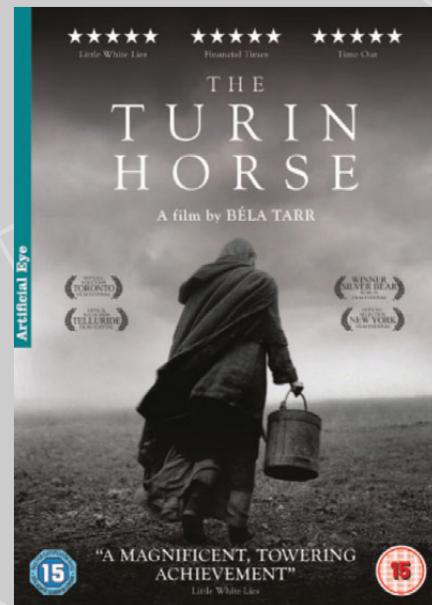
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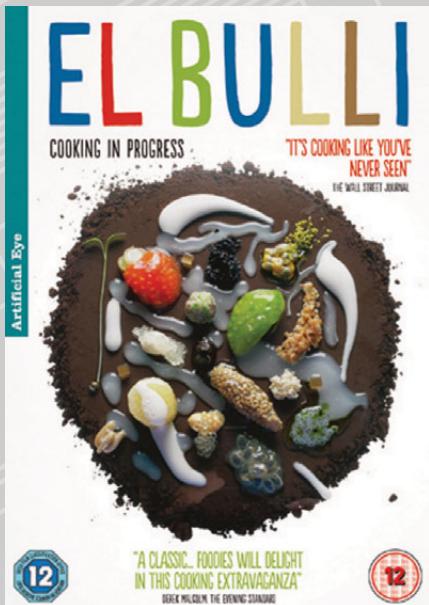
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# Editorial Nick James



## SURFING THE ANTI-CLIMAX

Much as this editorial team would love to bask in the glory of our relaunch and poll issue, we're all too aware that we've had our glory moment. Now it's all about the anti-climax, that empty feeling inside. That's how it felt ten years ago, and this time it's no different. We've got to nurture and adjust the new *Sight & Sound* even further and try to realise our fondest ambitions for it, but without the hoopla of being so much in the public eye.

Except that actually, sorry, no, we're not quite ready to let go. To soften the post-poll blues, I want to do a quick runthrough of our highlights package, with no guarantee there won't be slo-mo tears, Olympics-style.

Those of us who'd been here for the 2002 edition knew that the poll made newspaper headlines; we expected social media to make some difference. But even we were astonished at how positive and lively the debates around the polls have been. And to have had well over a quarter of a million visitors to our website is as staggering as it is gratifying.

*Vertigo*'s toppling of *Citizen Kane* sparked several amusing media takes including a full page in *The Sun* where, under the headline 'Kaned', you could read that Sam Mendes's Top Ten included *Fanny and Alexander*. This was swiftly followed by a two-page *Daily Express* article on Hitchcock entitled 'Genius or Sex Pest?'. On TV and radio shows I expected aggressive attacks from populists asking why there were so few blockbusters in the Top 100, but very few interviewers wanted to push that line. They were all – or so it seemed during the 'silly season' – secret cinephiles, delighted to talk about what makes a great film. And we had countless like-minded supporters right across the international cinephile sorority/fraternity who boosted interest in the polls off their own bat.

Nowhere did we encounter any great indignation at the end of *Kane*'s reign. What we did find was that, no matter how well prepared we thought we were in terms of extrapolating information from the results, others often beat us to it before we could publish new permutations online (see [explore.bfi.org.uk/sightandsoundpolls/2012](http://explore.bfi.org.uk/sightandsoundpolls/2012)). The two main focal points of attention were the lack of recent films in the Top 100, and the lack of films made by women.

The one obvious factor in the absence of newer films is that titles made after the introduction of video

*If you remove all the male voters from the critics' poll, the list of the top films doesn't change very much. If women directors are being underrated, they're being underrated by both genders*



have a harder time gaining a critical consensus. That bias will slowly disappear with the older generations of voters, who still remember having to treasure a film the one time you saw it. To say that is, of course, to assume that film will keep its status as an artform, and that the *S&S* poll will continue to matter. Before we conducted these polls I might have said that was in question. Now I feel much more optimistic.

On the separate matters of women as critics and directors, it was interesting to discover that if you remove all the male voters from the critics' poll, the list of the top films doesn't change very much – which means that if women directors are being underrated, they're being underrated by both genders. As for the small number of the chosen films that were *made* by women, that isn't something you can lay at the door of critics. It's the world's film industries that under-employ women, and I am reminded here of a point made to me by the directors Carol Morley and Clio Barnard on the night of the poll announcement – that, in the UK at least, women directors are encouraged to do their own projects, but are rarely considered to direct the hot scripts doing the rounds.

One fascinating contrast, given how hard we tried to make our poll truly international, was the parallel poll conducted exclusively by Chinese critics (for the website [cinephilia.net](http://cinephilia.net)). Where our critics' poll made Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love* the highest-placed film from the 21st century, theirs preferred Edward Yang and Jia Zhangke, and didn't rate Wong's films very highly (thereby putting more pressure on *Grandmaster*, Wong's follow-up to *My Blueberry Nights*). And lastly, the one request we didn't expect – but perhaps should have – was to single out for perusal the films that got one vote each. There could be some revelations to come. **S**

OBJECT LESSONS

## TAKE YOUR PICK

Sharon Stone's predatory siren is a dab hand with an ice pick in the *Basic Instinct* films, signifying a reversal of phallic power

By Hannah McGill

Before, between and during the time periods covered in *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Basic Instinct 2* (2006), Sharon Stone's Catherine Tramell commits murder by a variety of means. Or does she? The final thrust of the first film is that she's probably guilty many times over, but still more fun out of jail than in – for us as for her lover Detective Nick Curran (Michael Douglas), who by the implication of the closing bed scene has agreed to his own *grande mort* in exchange for a few more of the *petite* kind. The second film leans more heavily on what is only a hint in the first: that Catherine is not directly guilty, but a psychosexual *agent provocateur* whose erotic charisma so disorders the 'basic instincts' of those around her as to drive them to murder.

Technically bloody-handed or not, Catherine's place in movie iconography remains that of a serial killer – one of the over-educated, canny, white-collar kind that bedevils the American imagination no less than the drooling, primal (in)breed. And the dead bodies that pile up around her frequently get that way by ice pick. It's swiftly established that Catherine is a dab hand with this implement; when, at his house, Nick starts shattering ice for their drinks, she promptly takes his weapon from him – and does a better job. Nick's sexual chemistry with Catherine is predicated not just on the exact conjunction of his sex and death drives – the fantasy that orgasm and death will coincide – but also on the promised reversal of phallic power: his penetration by her.

The idea of sex worth risking death for is a guilty, euphemistic niggle in the classical *film noir*: it's Phyllis Dietrichson's anklet as fixated upon by Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (1944); it's Dix Steele's swooning "I was born when she kissed me, I died when she left me, I lived a few weeks while she loved me" in *In a Lonely Place* (1950). But the femme-fatale revival of the 1980s and 90s (after a couple of decades in which, very broadly speaking, heroines and antiheroines



The ice queen: Sharon Stone's Catherine Tramell symbolically disarms Michael Douglas's Nick Curran

## 'Hollywood Costume', V&amp;A

Promising to collect Hollywood costumes from Chaplin to 'Avatar', with stops along the way for such outfits as Scarlett O'Hara's green dress from 'Gone with the Wind' and Dorothy's blue-and-white gingham pinafore from 'The Wizard of Oz' (right), the V&A's major autumn exhibition runs from 20 October to 27 January.



## 'Lawrence of Arabia' 50th anniversary

The director's cut of David Lean's majestic 1962 epic (right) has been given a new 4K digital restoration to mark its half-century, and the results are by all accounts a knockout. The film is released by Sony on Blu-ray on 10 September, and is back in UK cinemas from 16 November.



ON OUR RADAR

## ANATOMY OF A MOVIE KILLING THEM SOFTLY

alike stood a higher chance of being tragically hardbitten or meltingly kooky than amoral or sexually omnipotent) made hot sex a part of the onscreen action. From the vantage point of an age in which internet screen grabs, ratings-sensitive studios and an influential Christian lobby have steered producers and stars away from explicit content, the high-gloss mediumcore pummellings of *Basic Instinct* appear at once shocking and quaint – their reveal/conceal choreography unthinkably coy in the context of freely available online porn, yet still targeted to arouse with an unironic directness beyond the daring of the current mainstream. Catherine's body is, like her ice pick, an instrument at once crude and pointed. She can throw an interrogation off with a mere flash of bare crotch; but she can also use her sexual hold over Nick to get inside his head.

The notion of female body as murder weapon runs throughout the 90s erotic-thriller genre, reaching its most literal conclusion in Uli Edel's *Body of Evidence* (1992), which cast Madonna (herself a significant pop-culture precursor to Catherine Tramell) as a woman given to actually fucking men to death. Catherine's concealed ice pick, troubling Nick even as he pursues gratification, is representative of the feminine capacity to feign. If his sexual passion is ungovernable, rendering him weak, Catherine's appears to be within her complete control; if he can be aroused and unmanned by her at will, her phallic object is in a state of perpetual readiness... Catherine's bisexuality increases her threatening power; in the terminology of Luce Irigaray (who she probably read in the course of what Nick calls her "degree in screwing with people's heads"), she is auto-satisfying, way beyond the reach of penis envy or phallic dominance.

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'Body of Evidence'

*The concealed ice pick, troubling Nick even as he pursues gratification, is representative of the female capacity to feign*

The association of Catherine's destructive sexual autonomy with ice connects her to the serial murderer of 1948's *Blonde Ice* ("You're not a normal woman – you're not warm..."), and to the iconography of Hitchcock's 'cool blondes' – though Hitchcock never let a woman escape the fray so unruffled. Catherine gets to keep her cool, attaining, by the end of *Basic Instinct* 2, the mythic indestructibility of a horror-movie monster. By contrast, the femme fatale of 2010's erotic-thriller reboot *Black Swan* is a mirage – the escaped id of a tremulously feminine creature whose sexual aggressiveness is a symptom of encroaching madness, and who's done in by self-regard (in the literal form of a shard of mirror). Vulnerability is back; manipulative sexual mystique is a devalued currency in the age of the paparazzi crotch shot and the blog confessional. *Basic Instinct*'s vulva-flash has been replaced by the neurosis-baring and pratfalls of *Bridesmaids*, *Bachelorette* and HBO's *Girls*; Madonna's provocations with the 'master me' whimpers of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

If Catherine Tramell has current inheritors, they're probably the jaded, glamorous Ice Queens of recent *Snow White* and *Narnia* adaptations – who are defeated by the young, naive and unspoiled. Even the cartoon-bodied porn stars whose industrial language *Basic Instinct* borrowed are being ousted by ungroomed 'amateurs'. Should this be seen as a victory for honesty, or a sad loss of even the illusion of power? Ladies, take your pick...



'Double Indemnity'

25% *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973)

15% *Goodfellas* (1990)

12% *Fargo* (1995)

10% *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950)

9% *Reservoir Dogs* (1992)

8% *The Sopranos* (1999-2007)

5% *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009)

4% *Slacker* (1990)

4% *Le Samouraï* (1967)

3% *The Driver* (1978)

3% *Saturday Night Fever* (1978)

2% *The Hangover* (2009)

### Peter Watkins, Tate Modern

We're excited by this rare chance to see Peter Watkins's work on the big screen. The retrospective includes 'Privilege', 'The War Game', 'Edvard Munch' (right), 'La Commune (Paris 1871)', 'The Freethinker' and more, and runs from 14-28 September.



### Pedro Costa, ICA

The Portuguese director (below) is visiting London's ICA for two one-off screenings of his work. 'Casa de Lava' is showing on 30 September, and either 'Ne change rien' or 'In Vanda's Room' on 2 October. Costa himself will be at both for a post-film Q&A. The screenings mark the DVD release of 'In Vanda's Room' by Second Run.



### The 56th BFI London Film Festival

Autumn is upon us, which means it's LFF time. This year's festival is opened by Tim Burton's 'Frankenweenie' and closed by Mike Newell's take on 'Great Expectations'. We at S&S are proud that our own sponsored screening this year is Romanian Cristian Mungiu's follow-up to '4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days', 'Beyond the Hills' (right). The LFF runs 10-21 October.



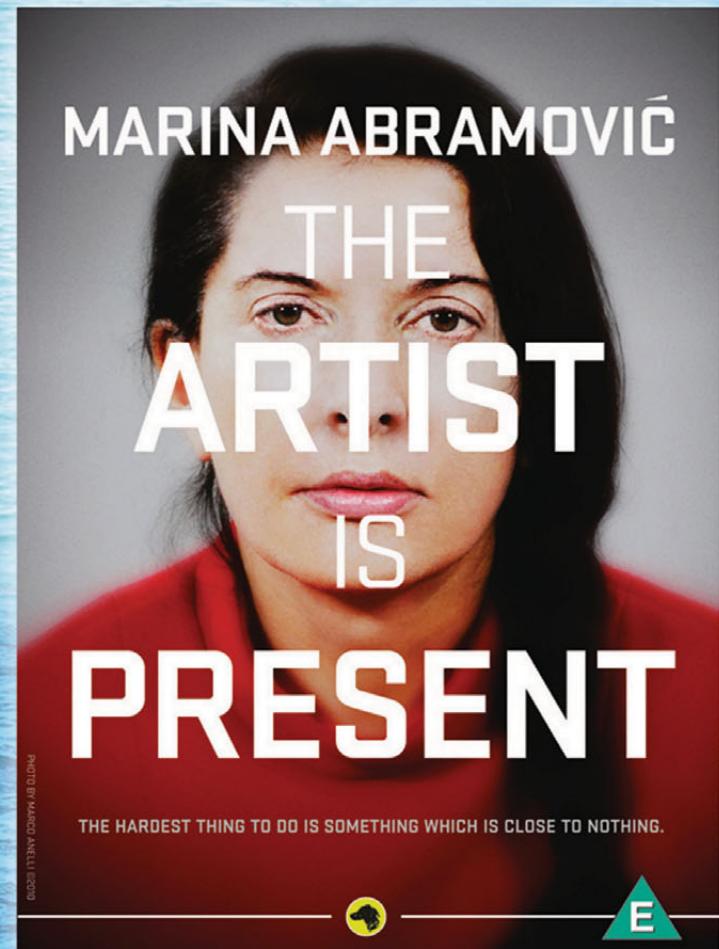
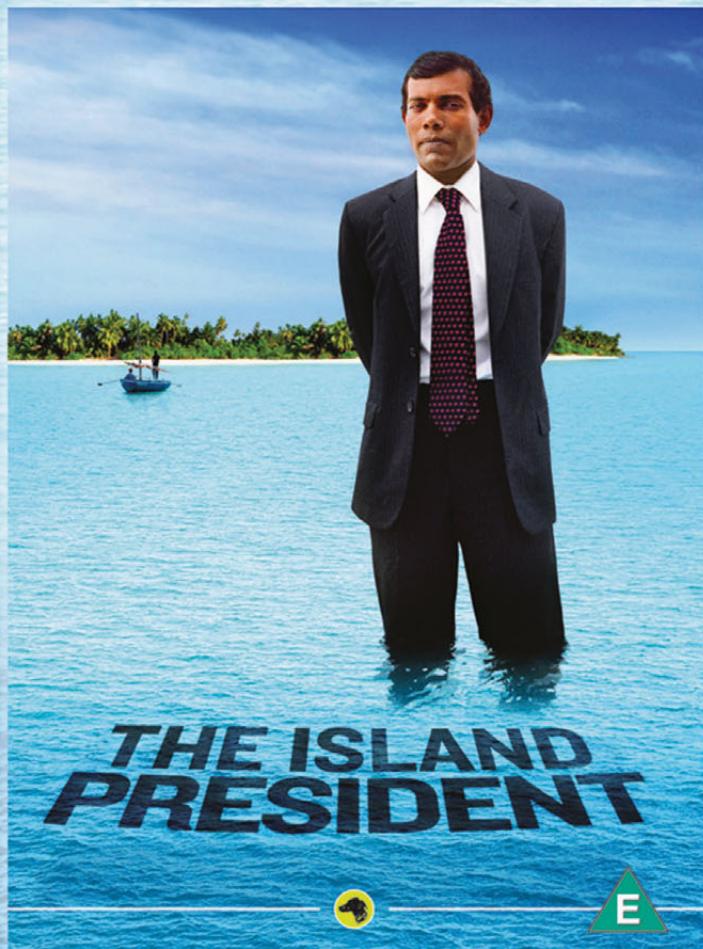
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# STREET CREDIBILITY

Wendell B. Harris's *Chameleon Street* is a gloriously strange one-off that deserves to be enjoyed by a new generation

By Ashley Clark

Wendell B. Harris's *Chameleon Street* (1989) had me in its grip long before I'd seen it. I'd first come across its enigmatic title in Ed Guerrero's book *Framing Blackness: The African-American Image in Film*, and was intrigued; it sounded as suggestive of a tricky central character as of a road you'd better think twice about walking down. After years of imagining what the film might hold (it's never been released on any format in the UK), I tracked down a rare US DVD copy, and wasn't disappointed.

Inspired by a 1983 *Detroit Free Press* article, *Chameleon Street* is the dizzying account of real-life Michigan individual William Douglas Street, who forged a briefly successful career as a conman in the 1970s and 80s. Strapped for cash, Street began his peripatetic career of deception as an extortionist, before posing as a reporter, a gynaecological surgeon (he successfully performed 36 hysterectomies before being caught), an exchange student and a lawyer.

At the 1990 Sundance Film Festival, *Chameleon Street* upset the odds to beat the likes of Hal Hartley's *The Unbelievable Truth*, Whit Stillman's *Metropolitan* and Charles Burnett's *To Sleep with Anger* to the Grand Prix – the award that had gone to Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* a year earlier.

The qualities that persuaded the jury are evident on the first watch. Episodic in structure, with a bone-dry, basso-profondo narration from Harris himself as Street, it's a complex examination of the interplay of race, identity and economics as refracted through its ambiguous subject. It's also hilariously funny in places, thanks to Juilliard graduate Harris's exquisite comic timing and gift for delivering his self-penned screenplay's near-incessant flood of dextrous wordplay. An early highlight comes when Street challenges a loudmouth racist in a bar by ridiculing his grammar with a peacockish intellectual flourish. Though Street ends up with a smack in the face, it's a thrillingly odd sequence which plays like the gravelly deadpan flipside to Eddie Murphy's triumphal takedown of a bar full of rednecks in *48 Hrs* (1982).

In its tonally darker second half, *Chameleon Street* is awash with apt literary and cinematic allusions. With a French accent cribbed from Edith Piaf, Street poses as an exchange student under the telling alias Pépé le Moko. In a scene freighted with tragic irony, he wears the costume of Jean Cocteau's Beast at a lavish, hallucinatory French Revolution-themed party. Looming largest of all is the unnamed, isolated African-American hero of Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*.

*Chameleon Street* functions as one of the most complex screen accounts of the psychological realities of the 20th-century black American experience. Street's adventures vividly illustrate the idea of the "double consciousness" of African-Americans ("One ever feels his



Paint it black: 'Chameleon Street' is a quietly angry film about structural, endemic racism

*Harris's film is a complex examination of the interplay of race, identity and economics. It's also hilariously funny*

two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts"), as coined by sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. A frustrated Street spray-paints his daughter's Barbie doll black – an oblique, powerful reference to the Clarks, the psychologists who experimented with different coloured dolls to study children's racial notions.

Sadly, post-Grand Prix, *Chameleon Street* disappeared into bureaucratic hell, and a proper distribution deal was never secured. Remakes starring Will Smith and Wesley Snipes were mooted, but dismissed. Instead, after a meeting with Harvey Weinstein was reportedly botched by a sales agent, the film was belatedly released in a desultory trickle across selected US cinemas in 1991. Though the early 90s ostensibly represented a boom time for black filmmakers (think Spike Lee, John Singleton), Harris found himself the butt of a particularly acid industry joke: "All you have to do to get a production deal in Hollywood today is be black, male and NOT Wendell Harris." Even so, the film was prescient. In one scene, under pressure from a drug dealer, Street ruminates, "Do I have to deal drugs in order to make money?" He might have been directly addressing the drugs 'n' gangs-shaped box into which much black American cinema was ushered by studios in the 1990s.

To further rub salt into the wound, the real-life Street was disappointed with the film. In his gossipy account of the decade's indie scene *Spike, Mike, Slackers and Dykes*, John Pierson put the boot in, describing Harris's appearance as "the most memorable Sundance incident of egomania run amok". Then, in a deliciously ironic, Street-esque twist, Will Smith went on to star as a conman posing as Sidney Poitier's son in the successful, thematically similar *Six Degrees of Separation* (1992).

Over time, Harris came to believe that

the film had been actively suppressed, like Ivan Dixon's 1973 *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (a controversial film about a black CIA agent-turned-political activist, which had most of its prints seized and destroyed, possibly by the FBI). It's not hard to imagine white execs being unsettled by the scene in which Street (as lawyer) chides a group of colleagues as "wily Caucasians". There's no doubt about it: *Chameleon Street* is a quietly angry film about structural, endemic racism that refuses to reduce its issues to speechifying or formulaic dramatic crescendos.

Some belated recognition came via US video release, while rap duo Black Star used a snippet of dialogue for the intro to their 1998 song 'Brown Skin Lady'. The 2007 US DVD release promised to raise the film's profile, but even that was compromised. The distribution company was acquired by another firm, which forced Harris to pay the restoration and distribution costs out of his own pocket, severely limiting its reach. In 2009 it was paired with *sex, lies and videotape* and screened at a Sundance showcase, but its minor status was accentuated by its position next to the juggernaut of Soderbergh's successful subsequent career. With a couple of minor acting credits and stalled directorial projects to his name, *Chameleon Street* – absurdly – remains Harris's only feature as a director.

Film critic Armond White has quipped that today Street himself would likely land his own reality-TV show, such is our current cultural fascination with sociopaths. Though it remains as defiantly weird as ever, it's tempting to think that if the film were made today, it would benefit from a more flexible distribution landscape, and slot nicely into the growing trend for morally murky docudramas like *Catfish* and Bart Layton's tricksy *The Imposter*.

As it is, *Chameleon Street* exists as a gloriously strange one-off that deserves to be appreciated by a new generation sure to delight in its rich palette of cinematic reference, humour and formal invention. A lost masterpiece of black American cinema, *Chameleon Street* is, as I discovered, a cinematic road well worth walking. One just needs to locate it.

# STRAIGHT AND CURLY

Andrei Rublev didn't just inspire Tarkovsky – he also represents one side of a dichotomy that's still relevant to film

By Mark Cousins

My recent films are showing in Moscow soon. I've never seen the Russian icons painted by Andrei Rublev, about whose trek Andrei Tarkovsky made his famous film, so I'm hoping to sneak a few days after the screenings to do so.

To get into the spirit, I've been reading a history of icon painting, from which has emerged one fact I'm still trying to understand. Whereas Western European art from the Renaissance onwards became more curly and expressive (Baroque to Mannerism and Rococo, etc), Russian painting became less so. Instead of ditching the straight lines of medievalism and Byzantium for more figurative and modelled imagery, the Russian style in Novgorod and Moscow became more linear.

There were theological and historical reasons for this unexpected retrenchment from the human and curvilinear in Russia, but it's fun and useful to ask how the straight-bendy scale can be applied to an artform that came about nearly 500 years after Rublev: cinema. What happens when we try to situate films on this aesthetic Kinsey scale? It's easy to see that the films of Mizoguchi Kenji, Miklós Jancsó, Bernardo Bertolucci and Max Ophuls, for example, are at the flexuous end of things, if only because each of these directors prefers a tracking camera, twisting to the left and right of its flowing axis. Far away from their arabesques are the linearity of Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, the plunging perspective and hard lines of Stanley Kubrick's movies such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* or *The Shining*, the formal resolve of Robert Bresson's work, the unswayability of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, the symmetry of Terence Davies. There are some strange bedfellows there.

But glance back 500 years to Andrei Rublev's paintings and we find that, as you'd expect, the increasing Russian linearity wasn't just a visual fad. These painters avoided full-hearted sweeps and parabolas because they probably found such imagery too responsive to emotional and human specifics. They wanted their icons to be more spiritual than that and so deployed more straight lines, which are less curious about the physical and the everyday. Such lines carry on their way, regardless of what profanity they encounter. Couldn't we say the same about Davies, Akerman, Kubrick and Bresson, and some of the films of the great Indian modernist filmmaker Mani Kaul, particularly his austere but beautiful *Our Daily Bread* (*Uski Roti*, 1970), and the unbending films of Straub-Huillet and the highly planned art of Tarantino too? These are filmmakers who don't really respond to unforeseen moments. Ask anyone who has worked with Terence Davies: he can describe the whole film before a frame has been shot. The certitude in Kubrick films is not something that will emerge during



The line of beauty: a 15th-century icon of John the Baptist, painted by Andrei Rublev

*These painters avoided sweeps and parabolas because they found such imagery too responsive to emotion*

the shoot. It is set, just as the doctrinal truth of the Russian Orthodox church was set for Rublev and his compadres (though, looking back, Russian Orthodoxy was in dialogue with the Greek church and other things).

We could say that these filmmakers work inflexibly – as long as we use the word flexibly. To modern ears, inflexible means blind or blinkered, but the linearity of these axial directors involves seeing through things rather than not seeing things; their films see beyond the temporary. Kubrick and Akerman do not tell us the time by the fleeting second hand.

So the straight-curly scale is about time as much as space. The linear directors are loyal to a point of view outside time, from which they look back into it. Doesn't that describe *Barry Lyndon*, *Pickpocket*, *Jeanne Dielman*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Distant Voices, Still Lives*? If so, which other filmmakers might we include? Michael Mann, surely. Jean-Luc Godard? I'd have put him down as a linear artist until, recently, the film curator Tom Luddy showed me the amazing footage Godard shot on the set of Coppola's *One from*

*the Heart*, in which the camera is more mobile than Ophuls's and the light as impressionistic as Monet's. The films of Pier Paolo Pasolini are very straight (not a sentence I thought I'd ever write), but then his imagery nicks ideas from Giotto, who died just before Andrei Rublev was born, and who himself was on the cusp between linear and figurative fresco painting.

In modern cinema, no one does perspective and linearity better than the brilliant Swedish director Roy Andersson. I've never thought of Andrei Rublev and Roy Andersson together before, but hold an image of the work of each in your head and you notice that the saints in the paintings and the sinners in the films are similarly static, downcast and beyond emotion. And the same is true about the films of a squad of other recent art cinema filmmakers like Pedro Costa, Bruno Dumont, Cristi Puiu and many new Mexican directors.

Can we say that the linearity in modern cinema is closer to contemplation, whereas curvy movies are more about sensation? The camera-on-a-rope visual Tarzanism of *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Avengers Assemble* bears this out, but it's wrong to generalise; a lot of meditative art is swirly (think mandalas). But just as painting in Europe in the 1900s was arguing with itself, so movies today are arguing with themselves. The dispute is about money and escapism, reality and dreams, boys and girls. But it's also about straight and curvy.

# FRAGILE INDEPENDENCE

The ninth Beijing Independent Film Festival persevered in the face of power cuts and official interference

By Kevin B. Lee

While the words 'independent film' have lost some of their power in the Weinstein era of market-oriented offbeat fare, the recent shutdown of the ninth Beijing Independent Film Festival shows that the term can still be a source of contention and a statement of defiance in some places, with serious consequences for its adherents. Organised without the official government approval required of public film exhibitions in China, the Beijing festival had operated mostly without incident for much of the past decade until a political clampdown led to its first shutdown last year. At stake in the festival's survival are the meaning of the word 'independent' in the context of Chinese cinema, what that word affords filmmakers and artists who choose to produce works outside official purview, and the significance of those works in relation to the system.

According to festival head Li Xianting, unfruitful negotiations with officials in the weeks leading up to the festival hinged on whether its selections should even be considered 'films' under Chinese law. While China's State Administration of Film, Radio and Television requires that all films be subject to its approval, Li – a renowned critic and curator of the Beijing art scene – maintains that these independent films and videos should be defined as individual artworks of creative expression, distinguishable from commercial films and thus not subject to censorship. Regardless of whether this strategy risks the possibility that these works might fail to reach a wider commercial audience in the future, the overriding concern for Li and his colleagues is to give them a chance to be seen now.

And so the festival was set to proceed, until official requests to stop the opening screening (Huang Ji's Rotterdam Tiger winner *Egg and Stone*) were followed by a power cut that sent the full house into darkness; dozens more would-be attendees were turned away by police at the gates. The record turnout was remarkable given that the festival website has been shut down since last year; the Chinese microblog Weibo allowed word of the festivities to spread, as well as word of the incident. Following the power cut, among many expressions of concern was *Still Life* director Jia Zhangke's sarcastic post: "Rumour is the Film Bureau and the Electric Power Bureau have merged. Perhaps tomorrow I will take up shadow puppetry [which only needs candlelight]. But then will the fire brigade come after me?"

Undeterred, the festival regrouped in its offices, clearing desks to make space for two screening rooms. When news got out that authorities had caught on and were planning to cut power at the offices, local artists offered their homes for screenings, with guests told to wait at meeting points to be driven to the secret venues.



Chongqing express: 'China Concerto' explores images of one of China's biggest conurbations

## Wang Bo's 'China Concerto' was a welcome essay film à la Chris Marker, exploring images of Chongqing

Amid these surreal proceedings, it was fitting that many standout films dealt with cinema's power in both presenting and mediating social reality. Novelist Chai Chunya's debut feature *Four Ways to Die in My Hometown* adopts the festival's longstanding focus on rural and minority ethnography. Set in the plains and deserts of Chai's native Gansu village, it traces a life-and-death cycle adorned with symbolic visuals and elements of folklore. Chai strikes an unlikely balance between static hypnotic visuals, staged rituals and comic interludes.

Revelatory ethnography is also on display in *People's Park* by J.P. Sniadecki and Libbie Cohn, a single 72-minute take that tracks through a crowded city park on a busy afternoon, with more than 1,000 people passing across the screen. The film is a remarkable sensory experience, its virtuoso camerawork overshadowing its extremely impressive soundscape, with songs emanating from all directions and blending in an exultant din. It may well be the best musical of 2012.

More mundane in appearance but no less rigorous is Zou Xueping's *Satiated Village*, part of the Folk Memory Documentary Project, a series produced by Chinese doc legend Wu Wenguang in which amateur filmmakers conduct oral-history projects in their home villages. The title is a mildly sarcastic play on Zou's first feature *The Starving Village*, in which she interviewed elderly villagers about their experiences during the national famine that killed tens of millions during Mao's Great Leap Forward. In what amounts to a sequel, Zou tries to screen the film for her subjects, but meets resistance from family members who fear it may bring unwanted attention as a shameful reminder of a Communist legacy better left forgotten. Zou presses on, organising

screenings not only for the elderly villagers but also for local schoolchildren. The two events are stunning mirrors of each other, as both 90-year-olds and nine-year-olds debate whether the film will "bring shame to China", revealing a pervasive anxiety wrought by nationalism. But as the conversations continue, a less received, more conscientious engagement with history through communal discourse emerges almost miraculously before Zou's lens. Self-aware in the best sense, the film sets a high standard for the ethical practice of documentary filmmaking as a tool for social awakening.

Self-reflexivity yielded remarkable results in two films that clocked in at between 40-50 minutes, an awkward length for many festival programmers, but perhaps a perfect testament to BIFF's stated intent to embrace all lengths and formats. In a non-fiction landscape still dominated by Wiseman-esque observation, Wang Bo's *China Concerto* was a welcome essay film à la Chris Marker. Its epistolary narration explores images of Chongqing, the epicentre of attempts to revive pro-Communist culture under its mayor Bo Xilai, a political rising star who was deposed this year in conjunction with the conviction of his wife for the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood.

Generating the biggest buzz in relation to its length, Yuan Mingming's *Women Directors* is a 40-minute docu-fiction in which two female film-school graduates obsessively record their lives on camera. Treading a dangerous line between lurid voyeurism and disarming confessional, sexy narcissistic escapism and stark social realism, the film employs its regressive Freudian relationship with the camera as a springboard for diving into an exploration of a 21st-century reality of digitally mediated intimacy and self-identity, delivered through layers of handheld detail that describe what it's like to live in Beijing today. The collective impact of twentysomethings Yuan, Zou Xueping and Huang Ji announced a major development left unnoticed amid the cat-and-mouse screening confusion: that young women filmmakers are poised to break up the boys' club that has long held court in Chinese indie film.

“SOME KIND OF MIRACLE  
SPELLBINDING...NOT TO BE MISSED”

ROLLING STONE

“A REMARKABLE CREATION  
...ONE OF THE YEAR'S BEST FILMS”

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# THE SOUND OF SILENCE



An Englishman abroad: Charles Laughton, back turned, in 'Ruggles of Red Gap'

A stirring speech by Charles Laughton also provides a showcase for 1930s sound cinema's discovery of silence

#### By Jonathan Romney

Screen-sound theorist Michel Chion has suggested that the great contribution of Dolby stereo was to introduce a new possibility, namely silence, into the economy of the soundtrack. But silence existed as a value even in sound cinema's early days. Take Leo McCarey's 1935 comedy *Ruggles of Red Gap*, in which Charles Laughton plays an English butler whose aristocratic employer loses him at gambling to an American nouveau riche couple living in what's essentially the Wild West.

At one point Ruggles, thinking he's lost his job, is forlornly preparing to leave town, but first stops by the saloon. There he's reassured by his rough-diamond employer Egbert Floud (who's played, confusingly, by the actor Charles Ruggles) and told he's still welcome at his house. Ruggles says he'll stay on in Red Gap, but not as a servant: "I would like to stand on my own two feet. This is a land, sir, of great opportunity where all are created equal." This sets Floud enthusiastically musing: "What did Lincoln say that day at Gettysburg?"

But no one can remember. A succession of boozers and grizzled cowpokes confess they have no idea what Lincoln said. "What a fine bunch of Americans!" spits the barman with contempt.

There is one person, however, who knows. Cut to a close-up of Laughton's Ruggles at his table, profile in soft focus on the left, with Floud listening as the Englishman mutters *sotto voce*, indeed barely audibly, what's nevertheless recognisable as the Gettysburg Address: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Urged on by Floud, Ruggles goes on, and we see the others listening – a gallery of

weathered character-actor faces that embody a popular-woodcut idea of *fin de siècle* America. Meanwhile Laughton's voice becomes louder and clearer, and soon he stands up, his intonation eventually rising into a piece of fine English tremble-in-the-throat recitation (all the more deliciously incongruous, given Ruggles's self-effacing diffidence till now). The company listen in silence, with no background sounds except the odd muted footstep. As the speech ends, silence still hangs in the air, until the barman breaks it with, "I'll buy a drink."

The gist of this magnificently rhetorical moment is that you don't have to be American to be American – that generations of immigrants like Ruggles have seized the chance to remake themselves, and can teach home-grown citizens a thing or two about the values their nation was founded on.

But what's extraordinary about the scene is its mutedness. Silence frames Lincoln's text and Laughton's voice, as Ruggles begins, ever so softly – and literally in soft focus – to intone the words that only surge into the foreground once everyone pipes down and listens. (For an example of the film's fondness for soft English voices, listen to Roland Young's silky tones as Ruggles's former employer.)

Like a medium, Ruggles channels Lincoln's words from the past, becoming his voice in the present; you can imagine Laughton's precise, elegant enunciation working as well as any American actor's for a radio reading of the speech. For that's what this scene is, essentially: a radio broadcast.

Radio has always been a privileged vehicle for the solo speaking voice, as long as we're prepared to tune in and listen. Laughton's Ruggles starts out sonically and visually muted, and ends up fully visible and audible because the quiet authority of his voice has persuaded everyone to lean in and pay attention – to tune in to him. Quite apart from its ideological content, the scene is a plea for an intimate, attentive cinema, in which the quiet man too can be heard. It expresses a devout wish that cinema could be more like that other democratic medium – radio.

## TEN FILMS WHICH USE SLOW-MOTION

Prompted by the heady use of slow-motion in 'Dredd', we select ten other films which make inspired use of the effect



1



2



7



10

### 1. The Passions

Bill Viola, 2000

### 2. In the Mood for Love

Wong Kar-Wai, 2000

### 3. Raging Bull

Martin Scorsese, 1980

### 4. Orphée

Jean Cocteau, 1950

### 5. Hard-Boiled

John Woo, 1992

### 6. Blowjob

Andy Warhol, 1964

### 7. The Royal Tenenbaums

Wes Anderson, 2001

### 8. Entr'acte

René Clair, 1924

### 9. Bonnie and Clyde

Arthur Penn, 1967

### 10. Reservoir Dogs

Quentin Tarantino, 1991

DEVELOPMENT TALE

## LOVE ON THE RUN



Taking aim: Nick Love, left, on the set of 'The Sweeney' with Ray Winstone, who plays Regan

The journey to the screen has proved far from simple for Nick Love's version of the classic TV series *The Sweeney*

By Charles Gant

Following his agreeably low-key, personal-feeling 2001 debut *Goodbye Charlie Bright*, writer-director Nick Love's critical reputation seemed to slide in inverse proportion to his rising commercial status as the king of UK geezer cinema. Avowedly influenced by both Alan Clarke and Michael Mann, he showed traces of the former in the subject matter of his films, if not in their tone; as for the latter, any gestures in that direction were doomed by limited production budgets.

Having earned his spurs with his second feature, 2004's *The Football Factory* (more than one million DVDs sold in the UK), Love finally had a crack at the big time when Andrew Macdonald – whose company DNA functioned as a London production outpost for US indie Fox Searchlight – asked him if he'd like to have a go at a big-screen version of the classic TV series *The Sweeney* (1975-78). That

was summer 2006, and an enthusiastic Love quickly delivered five drafts of the screenplay, excited to be at the helm of an £8 million cop thriller that could bring some of the flavour and ambition of Mann's *Heat*. Macdonald's verdict? "Good, but not good enough," according to Love, who admits to a bruised ego when the producer then suggested handing over scripting duties to John Hodge, with whom Macdonald had worked successfully on both *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*.

"I remember reading John's first draft and going, 'This guy's a better writer than me, shit,'" Love recalls. "I just had that feeling of 'It's got more to it than mine.' Mine was at the level of *The Business* [Love's 2005 Danny Dyer vehicle]. It was very laddish, very japey, and it didn't have real scope. It wasn't ambitious. They were absolutely right to get John in."

It was around spring 2009 that Macdonald showed the script to his Fox Searchlight paymaster Peter Rice, a British-born, Los Angeles-based executive who understood the concept of *The Sweeney* but always questioned its appeal outside the UK. The conundrum was always this: could the film be broadened without diluting its essence; and if the UK audience remained the priority,

how much value could one territory deliver?

While Macdonald, his DNA partner Allon Reich and Love's own producer partner Allan Niblo pondered these issues, and Hodge worked on further drafts, attention turned to casting. Ray Winstone had long been in line to play elder cop Regan (the John Thaw role in the original TV series), and Love and casting director Gary Davy fancied rising name Tom Hardy to play Carter (the Dennis Waterman role), but Rice didn't bite on the latter after viewing a screen test. Davy's next suggestion was Michael Fassbender, who seemed a perfect fit for the role. Says Love, "I liked him enormously: a lovely twinkling smile, obviously a big hedonist, loves girls and boozing and late nights. And he wasn't too handsome – he was different handsome. Peter saw the screen test with Michael, said 'OK, I just about get that.'"

Deals were hammered out with Winstone and Fassbender, and the film moved into pre-production, with key department-head hires and location scouting, but the director was worried. "I remember thinking, 'This doesn't feel right,'" says Love. "This doesn't feel like a film that's nine weeks away from filming. There was a lack of contact with America."

He was right. "It hit the buffers about seven

## THE NUMBERS: SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN

weeks away from filming," he recalls. "DNA had made *Sunshine*, which had proved to be a loss-maker. Their deal was becoming tenuous at the same time as the banking crisis, at the same time as Peter going, 'I don't quite get it.' It all colluded against us at once."

Macdonald looked for other investors, but with that £8 million price tag, it was too rich for the market. Conveniently for Love, at that moment the opportunity presented itself to do his remake of another vintage piece of British TV, Alan Clarke's 1989 Screen Two *The Firm*, and he stepped off the *Sweeney* whirligig for a year. DNA brought on Alex Garland (*28 Days Later*) to punch up the script, but with the project gaining no traction, they finally offered to sell the property to Love and Niblo's company Vertigo. The only problem: the nearly £1 million in development costs that had accrued along the way. As Love explains,

*The question was: 'How low can you go?' When the bottom dropped out of the budget, that was the point of liberation*

"Fox/DNA spent money in development like they were making an £8 million movie. They had a different attitude. All the train tickets were first-class. Pre-visualisations for action sequences that were costing 70 grand. All these things came back to haunt me."

As Love worked on a new draft and Vertigo returned to market with a new budget of £6 million, the team celebrated Christmas 2010 believing they had achieved full funding from financier Prescience. That proved to be a false dawn when casting disagreements ensued – both Hardy and Fassbender were now out of reach – and Niblo began to wonder if the film could be achieved closer to the budgetary level of previous Vertigo productions.

"The question that Allan said to me was: 'How low can you go?'" Love recalls. "I'd heard £8 million, I'd heard £6 million, I'd heard £4 million, and suddenly the reality was it's going to be £2 million [not including development]."

Ambitious player eOne came in with money upfront for distribution rights for the UK and North America, and London-based financier Embargo covered the rest of the budget, quickly recouping out of sales of foreign distribution rights. Love was able to retain his big action set piece, which begins with a bank heist and continues with a shootout in Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery. He also had a free hand in casting, opting for Ben Drew aka Plan B as Carter, the role that had caused so much heartache.

"When the bottom dropped out of the budget," says Love, "that was the point of ultimate liberation. We were able to say, 'Let's cast someone who feels incredibly modern and fresh, who will bring a non-starry feel to it, and will be committed.' Ben is the revelation of the film."

**i** 'The Sweeney' is released in the UK on 12 September, and is reviewed on page 102

**By Charles Gant**

After 'Searching for Sugar Man' won an audience award at the Sundance Film Festival, the documentary's broad appeal seemed to be confirmed. But the relative obscurity of the topic – 1970s musician Rodriguez, who achieved his greatest fame in Apartheid-era South Africa – might have given distributors pause. In the UK, StudioCanal always saw the artist's virtually non-existent profile as a positive. "We felt that the film was a real discovery," explains marketing boss Hugh Spearing. "Every time it screened, audiences came out elated, feeling that they had discovered Rodriguez, the man and his music. And that was the approach we wanted to take."

The distributor's approach was "to try to preserve the mystery as much as possible", says Spearing, presenting the film as a detective story in which clues are pieced together by the South African fans trying to track the musician down. Taking a different tack from Sony Classics in the US, where awareness of Rodriguez was higher and there was little mystique to preserve, StudioCanal cut a trailer that left audiences unsure about how the quest for Rodriguez was resolved. It was only as the campaign developed, and the singer travelled to the UK to support the film and its soundtrack album, that the focus switched. Says Spearing, "It gradually became more about how and why he went away and how he came back."

In acquiring 'Sugar Man', StudioCanal chose to overlook a spotty UK box-office track record for similarly acclaimed music documentaries. Much-loved titles 'Dig!', 'Metallica: Some Kind of Monster' and 'Anvil! The Story of Anvil' all landed slightly disappointingly in the £110,000-£160,000 range in the UK, and apart from performance-based films such as 'In Bed with Madonna' and 'Buena Vista Social Club', the only music doc to have achieved serious numbers is Kevin



**Sweet smell of success: 'Searching for Sugar Man'**

Macdonald's aggressively promoted 'Marley'.

StudioCanal picked the last weekend in July for 'Sugar Man', a slot that was wide open for two reasons: it was the week after 'The Dark Knight Rises' opened; and it coincided with the start of the Olympic Games. A Thursday release allowed a solid day of takings before being clobbered by Danny Boyle's opening ceremony, with grosses recovering throughout the first week. Solid word of mouth saw it play steadily throughout August, reaching £314,000 at press time.

"We always saw this as a winner with audiences," says Spearing, "and our exit polling supported that view. We had 99% overall for willingness to recommend, and 96% audience satisfaction rated 'excellent' or 'very good', the highest we've ever had for any of our films."

### MUSIC DOCUMENTARIES AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Marley	2012	£954,305
Searching for Sugar Man	2012	£313,614*
Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten	2007	£160,619
Anvil! The Story of Anvil	2009	£156,920
The Filth and the Fury	2000	£117,282
Dig!	2005	£114,558
Metallica: Some Kind of Monster	2004	£111,258
Glastonbury	2006	£99,308
Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man	2006	£75,142
The Devil and Daniel Johnston	2006	£57,042
The U.S. vs John Lennon	2006	£46,653

\*still on release; chart excludes concert-based films

# A HARD WON LEGACY



**'Of Time and the City'** benefited from BBC acquisition money siphoned through micro-budget schemes

The departure of the BBC's head of film acquisitions, Steve Jenkins, is a blow to both the corporation and film culture in the UK

By David Locke

In August it was announced that Steve Jenkins, the man responsible for purchasing feature-film rights for all BBC channels, would be leaving his role after 15 years. Although he will continue to represent the BBC's involvement in low-budget feature-film schemes on a freelance basis, by the time you read this he will effectively be gone.

The BBC's budget for film acquisitions is being cut as part of the corporation's Delivering Quality First initiative, and Jenkins will not be directly replaced, with his responsibilities absorbed by the head of Programme Acquisition. A press release from the corporation stressed that fewer movies will be required for the post-*News at Ten* slot on BBC1, while BBC2 and BBC3 will also have their film output reduced. BBC2 will remain home to BBC Films, while BBC4 will continue to broadcast foreign-language drama.

Naysayers have frequently questioned the corporation's commitment to feature-film acquisition, and on initial reading the official missive has precipitated the furrowing of brows at the notion of any form of reduction. For all UK film distributors – especially in the foreign-language or specialised market – the acquisition of a film for theatrical distribution is intrinsically linked to a sale to the BBC or Channel 4; without it, it's virtually impossible to justify boarding a risky, non-commercial venture in a volatile exhibition landscape. So the news that BBC4 will continue its commitment to foreign-language fare will be widely welcomed.

*Jenkins will be best remembered for his unerring support of independent UK productions and filmmakers*

But the departure of Jenkins is undoubtedly a blow; his tenure at the BBC has been worth celebrating. While his role included trading with the studios to source the likes of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Shrek* for the festive season on BBC1, he'll be best remembered for his work on behalf of the BBC4 World Cinema strand, and his unerring support of independent UK productions and filmmakers, including Peter Strickland, Ben Wheatley and Joanna Hogg.

Acquiring 20 to 25 theatrically released foreign-language titles per year, Jenkins established BBC4 as a lifeline for audiences, filmmakers and independent distributors such as Metrodome, Revolver, Soda, StudioCanal and Trinity. His term saw a concerted move towards the support of an eclectic film culture, and a great leap forward in terms of scheduling compared to the early days of his association with the BBC, when foreign-language titles would invariably play at 2am in the morning.

The BBC has faced constant pressure to direct more of its acquisition spend towards UK films, but that's not always a straightforward process. While most UK films that have had any degree of success with audiences – and that *haven't* had investment from BBC Films or Channel 4 – will end up being bought by one of the major broadcasters, that still leaves many smaller British films out there without a TV buyer. Films are bought in a marketplace, and so many films produced now have little or no market value for television – which left Jenkins unable to justify paying large licence fees for them.

What he was able to do instead was siphon acquisition money into micro-budget film schemes like Microwave, Digital Departures and iFeatures. The BBC would pre-buy the TV rights and – working with partners such as Film London, the BFI and Creative England – have significant editorial input. Beneficiaries included Terence Davies's *Of Time and the City*, Eran Creevy's *Shift* and Ben Drew/Plan B's *Ill Manors*. In this respect, above all, Jenkins has left quite a legacy. Whatever the future holds in regards to the future of BBC film acquisition, it shouldn't be forgotten.

## IN PRODUCTION

● **George Sluizer**, the 80-year old Dutch director best known for his 1988 chiller 'The Vanishing', has finally completed 'Dark Blood' (pictured, below), a film he began working on in 1993, but was forced to shelf four-fifths of the way into the shoot following the death of his star, River Phoenix. It's unclear how Sluizer has finished the film, but his daughter says he has found "a creative solution" to Phoenix's absence. The film premieres at the Netherlands Film Festival on 27 September.



● **Darren Aronofsky** is to try his hand at that long-dormant genre, the biblical epic. Shooting is underway in Iceland on 'Noah', starring Russell Crowe as – yes – Noah, and written by Aronofsky with 'Gladiator' screenwriter John Logan. The supporting cast includes Jennifer Connolly, Emma Watson and Ray Winstone, and the film is due for a 2014 release.

● **Lynne Ramsay** (pictured, below) is to head west. The Scottish director is to follow 'We Need to Talk About Kevin' with a western entitled 'Jane Got a Gun', set to star Natalie Portman as a recently widowed woman who asks for help from a tough ex-lover (who, if reports are to be believed, will be played by Michael Fassbender) to fend off old enemies of her husband. Ramsay had previously talked about making an intriguing-sounding sci-fi version of 'Moby Dick', though whether that project will still go ahead is unclear.

● **Paul Greengrass**, though reportedly a Crystal Palace supporter, is at work on 'Barca', a documentary about the Catalan masters of tiki-taka football. The film charts the four years of manager Pep Guardiola's reign before his resignation at the end of last season, a period which saw the club win 13 trophies.

● **Bertrand Bonello**, whose 'House of Tolerance' was for many one of the films of 2011, is to direct a biopic of Yves Saint Laurent, focusing on the designer's most successful period between 1965 and 1976, the year of his renowned 'Russian collection'.

● **Duncan Jones**, director of 'Moon' and 'Source Code', is reportedly to direct a biopic of Ian Fleming, in an adaptation based on Andrew Lycett's biography 'The Man Behind James Bond'.



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# THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

Stuart Ford's financing and sales company IM Global is muscling in on territory that used to be the exclusive preserve of US studios

By Geoffrey Macnab

Stuart Ford may not be a familiar name to the general public, but in 2010 he came in at no.49 on *The Guardian's* 'Film Power 100' list. The founder and chief executive of financing and sales company IM Global, he has been instrumental in the success of such diverse films as Tom Ford's *A Single Man*, horror hit *Paranormal Activity* and British comedy *The Inbetweeners*. While working in every genre from arthouse to action, he has also created a business with a huge international reach. The company now has offices in LA, London and Mumbai. In 2010, Indian major Reliance Entertainment (a partner in Dreamworks) bought a stake in IM Global. Behind the scenes, too, he is a hugely influential powerbroker.

IM Global is one of the partners on the new British 3D sci-fi film *Dredd*, produced by Andrew Macdonald's DNA Films, and shot in Cape Town on a reported budget of \$45 million. "What excited us about that," says Ford, "was that, although there had been a *Judge Dredd* feature film before, this movie is a very authentic telling of the Dredd story. It's very loyal to the original comic strip. That's not something that really could be said of the earlier Stallone movie. It's not so much retreading ground as breaking ground".

IM Global brought the project to the Toronto Film Festival in 2010 and was able to clinch the heavy pre-sales that enabled the film to be made.

Ford acknowledges that post-*Avatar*, some films have been made in 3D for the sake of it. However, he insists that *Dredd* (whose cinematographer is Anthony Dod Mantle) is different: "One of the central plot points revolves around an illicit drug call Slo-Mo. The taker of Slo-Mo experiences everything at a hundredth of the speed of normal time. The film has great action-type sequences shot in this very colour-saturated 3D style to emphasise the Slo-Mo experience. It's very cool, very innovative."

You'd expect Ford to talk a good game. After all, having begun his career as an entertainment lawyer, he spent seven years at Miramax, working under the Weinstein brothers. "I left very shortly before Harvey and Bob exited the company. I could see the icebergs looming! I was there from 1997 to 2004," he recalls of a period which saw him involved in such projects as *Shakespeare in Love* and *Chicago*. And yes, Harvey had a big personality. "He is like that. He is the real deal. What I gleaned from him was his appetite to excel." Ford talks of the Weinsteins' intense competitiveness, "their sheer will to win". Even now, he says, "I find myself almost every day confronted with a situation and thinking, 'What would Harvey do?' That doesn't necessarily mean I will do what he would have done!"

As Ford explains, IM Global's strategy has been to muscle into the space vacated by the Hollywood majors, now that they're focusing



Stuart Ford: 'We are more respectful of a director's vision than the studios have been in the past'

more and more on huge-budget franchises: "Our sweet spot are movies in the \$40 to \$60 million range, thrillers, action movies – a lot of the films that were a staple of Hollywood output for many years but these days are slightly neglected by the studios who are perpetually in pursuit of their next tentpole."

When Ford started IM Global in 2007, he says his goal was to have "a hip, thriving, indie sales company". However, when Reliance bought a majority stake in 2010, the company was able to raise its ambitions yet further. Since then, IM Global has financed or co-financed 15 films, "which probably makes us as prolific as [anyone] outside the major studios. That's all driven by Reliance's backing." At the same time, IM Global has been branching further into Asia with its pan-Asian distribution arm, Apsara.

In spite of its international footprint, Ford (based in LA) tries to stay loyal to his British roots. He grew up in Liverpool, and a few years ago was part of a consortium that very nearly bought Liverpool Football Club. It's a point of principle for him that IM Global continues to invest in British talent.

Ford's hope now is that *Walking with Dinosaurs 3D*, on which IM Global is partnering with the BBC, will be the monster hit that will enable the company to expand further. When the project was introduced to distributors at the 2010 American Film Market, the

*If I see something cool and it has commercial bone, I don't back off because it's British. Unlike much of the rest of the industry...*

company reportedly secured more than \$30 million in pre-sales. "That could be our *Twilight* or our *Lord of the Rings*," he enthuses.

Other British projects he is backing include *Hummingbird*, a London-set thriller starring Jason Statham and directed by Steven Knight, and Nick Murphy's *Blood*, starring Paul Bettany. "If I see something cool and think it has commercial bone, I don't back off just because it's British," he insists. "Unlike much of the rest of the industry..."

The British projects sit alongside more traditional fare like IM Global's forthcoming Walter Hill movie *Bullet to the Head*, starring Sylvester Stallone and Christian Slater, and Niels Arden Oplev's *Dead Man Down*, with Colin Farrell. One recent project that didn't perform as hoped, however, was Madonna's *WE*. "I think she is just such a lightning rod," says Ford. "It's a perfectly enjoyable film and very well made. If that had gone out under the name of a first-time filmmaker or Sofia Coppola, people would have said it was innovative, distinctive, entertaining and beautifully crafted... Unfortunately Madonna has a profile and a status that meant she was always going to get a kicking!"

As the company grows, Ford suggests that IM Global is becoming more and more involved "on the creative level". Although "physical production on set is not our forte, when it comes to the marketability of the film and the global distribution, that's what we do," Ford explains. "We're not just providing the money."

Another reason filmmakers want to work with his company, he adds, is that "we are certainly more respectful of a director and producer's vision and autonomy than the studios have been in the past."

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**Q. What was the first film directed by Howard Hawks?**

- a. The Cradle Snatchers
- b. The Road to Glory
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*One-time enfant terrible Leos Carax's return to feature films after a 13-year absence, 'Holy Motors' is at once an unclassifiable, hugely original vision and a compendium of visual references to cinema, from the silent era to the digital – six of which are decoded here*

By David Thompson

# FILM OF 1000 FACES

While Leos Carax may protest against any discussion of influences and references, all of his films have been steeped in the history of cinema, from Griffith to Godard and beyond. After the long silence that followed the commercial failure of his apocalyptic love story *Pola X* (1999) – interrupted only by 'Merde', one segment of the portmanteau film *Tokyo!* (2008) – he has now returned with a tender, sometimes exuberant and wholly bizarre work that makes no concessions to the mainstream. And if that has meant accepting the compromise of (very fine) digital photography and a small budget, then as Jean Cocteau – one of the presiding angels of 

**CRAZY MIXED-UP ID**  
The anarchic Monsieur  
Merde is just one of a dozen  
incarnations of Denis  
Lavant's protagonist in  
Leos Carax's 'Holy Motors'

 *Holy Motors*—commented, “Film will only become an art when its materials are as inexpensive as pencil and paper.”

*Holy Motors* reunites Carax with the actor Denis Lavant, who he revealed in his first three feature films—*Boy Meets Girl* (1984), *The Night Is Young* (*Mauvais Sang*, 1986) and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991). In each of those he played a character called Alex; now he is Monsieur Oscar, a man driven around Paris in a white stretch limo for a series of encounters real and surreal, in each of which he embodies a vastly different persona. Carax has joked—or perhaps he’s serious, one can’t be sure—that if Lavant had not been available, then he would have offered the part to Lon Chaney or Charles Chaplin, or to Peter Lorre or Michel Simon.

Masters of disguise and sacred monsters—it’s the imaginative spirit of such icons and the excessive films they dominated that pervades *Holy Motors*. The scene of Lavant preparing his make-up (expertly done, low budget or not) in the mirror recalls the famous images of Chaplin becoming the clown in *Limelight* (1951), or Chaney creating one of his thousand faces. Such shape-changing comes with name-changing: Leos Carax is the *nom de cinema* of Alexandre Dupont, being an anagram of ‘Alex Oscar’. Denis Lavant has served well as the director’s muscular alter ego (or perhaps, rather, alter id), his physical exuberance and brute looks having rarely found a worthy place elsewhere in cinema (a notable exception being Claire Denis’s magnificent *Beau Travail*).

Is *Holy Motors* both an obituary and a manifesto for cinema today? Death is certainly in the air: the recurrent images of cemeteries, the episode in which Monsieur Oscar plays a dying man, an assassination that goes awry, the fatal mystery of Paris by night—and the very act of filming, which must always be a record of passing lives. The film is also haunted by the recent passing of two people very close to Carax: his faithful production associate of many years Albert Prevost (who gave him the CD containing ‘Revivre’, the haunting song used towards the end of the film); and the Russian actress to whom *Holy Motors* is dedicated—Katia (or Yekaterina) Golubeva, who was the extraordinary female lead in *Pola X*, and for a time the director’s lover. Yet in giving us a fantastical, intensely personal journey that is ultimately as much about the medium as its creator, Carax has made a film like no other, while resolutely a part of them all.

 **‘Holy Motors’ is released on 28 September, and is reviewed on page 89. Leos Carax is the subject of ‘For and Against’ on page 66**



## 1 Portals

After the opening credits, *Holy Motors* begins with a scene in a sparse, gloomy bedroom or hotel room, where a figure rises from his sleep—Leos Carax himself. When I interviewed the director once, he smoked constantly and never once removed his dark glasses, claiming he had hurt his eyes in the Californian desert. True to form, his first actions in *Holy Motors* are to don his shades and light a cigarette, before moving across the room to discover a secret door in a wall papered to evoke a mysterious forest (above). Carax has said that it was only later that he saw the parallel with the descriptive opening lines of Dante’s *Inferno* (“Midway upon

the journey of our life/I found myself within a forest dark...”).

Here the ‘forest’ is a portal into a corridor that leads to the balcony of a cinema. The obvious cinematic predecessor is Jean Cocteau’s *The Blood of a Poet* (1930, below), in which said poet is shown prowling his hotel room, falling through a mirror (an action subsequently repeated in the classic scene of entering the underworld in Cocteau’s *Orphée*) and spying through keyholes. Cocteau described his film as evoking “a kind of half-sleep through which I wandered as though in a labyrinth”—like the act of gazing at a cinema screen, in fact.





2

### Street people

At the Cannes Film Festival press conference for *Holy Motors*, Carax said he often saw a decrepit beggarwoman in Paris, and nurtured a fantasy that he might change clothes at a nearby café and assume her role. This character – the first of Monsieur Oscar's various incarnations (above), a figure with whom no-one on the street can communicate, and whom most ignore – is also a homage to the homeless Alex played by Lavant in *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (below), who spent a lot of that film limping on a crutch with one foot in a cast. (Though in *Holy Motors* the Parisian bridge used is a different one, the Pont Alexandre III.)



*Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* demonstrated Carax's fearlessness in depicting the miseries of the deprived and socially outcast, both in the semi-documentary scenes of the nightly round-ups of destitutes, and in the film's emotionally and physically scarred protagonists. Thanks to its three-year production schedule (shooting both in Paris and on a vast set constructed in the south) and a budget that ballooned as injuries and shifting producers caused delays, the 1991 film unfortunately landed Carax with a reputation as a supremely difficult and demanding auteur.



3

### Motion capture

*Holy Motors* opens with a shot recreating the early 'scientific' filming of human motion by Etienne-Jules Marey (below), the French counterpart to Eadweard Muybridge. When Lavant changes into a motion-capture suit – appearing like an ocean diver covered with strategically placed lightbulbs (top) – and enters a studio to perform a sequence of actions, Carax is referencing both the beginnings of cinema and its current most commercial manifestation, replacing live humans on celluloid with computer-generated recreations of the human form.

Carax has compared the way Monsieur Oscar falls off a treadmill and exhausts himself as a victim of the machine to Chaplin in *Modern Times* (1936), but his attitude towards the end result is more ambivalent than Chaplin's. The virtual sex we witness between Lavant and



his highly flexible partner is undeniably passionate, and their transformation into fantastical creatures seeks to achieve an ecstasy approaching that of James Cameron's interplanetary lovers in *Avatar* (above). And aren't the contrasted personas adopted by Lavant themselves a series of avatars made possible by the transformative medium of cinema?



GETTY (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

4

**Captives**

After *Pola X*, Carax spent years in development wasteland before being reunited with Lavant for an episode in the portmanteau film *Tokyo!*, in which the actor played a mutant subterranean named Merde (shit) who terrorises the city with his outlandish behaviour. For his third 'character' in *Holy Motors*, Lavant reprises this role, causing mayhem at a cemetery fashion shoot and stealing away the mute model (Eva Mendes, below right) to install her in his lair down in the sewers. (The model's name, Kay M, is a nod to an unrealised Carax project that was to have starred Kate Moss alongside Lavant.)

Merde is clearly less the aristocrat monster of Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and more the anarchic devil knocking aside a blind man's stick played by Jean-Louis Barrault in Jean Renoir's version of the Jekyll and Hyde story, *Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier* (1961, top right).

Ultimately, however, Merde is revealed as the romantic victim of society's indifference, along the lines of Lon Chaney's vengeful Phantom of the Opera, or even (with nudging music borrowed from the original soundtrack of *Godzilla*) a scaled-down King Kong (below), remorselessly violent but unexpectedly tender towards his captive (even if Merde sports a highly visible erection in her presence).



*Merde is unexpectedly tender towards his female – even if he sports a highly visible erection in her presence*



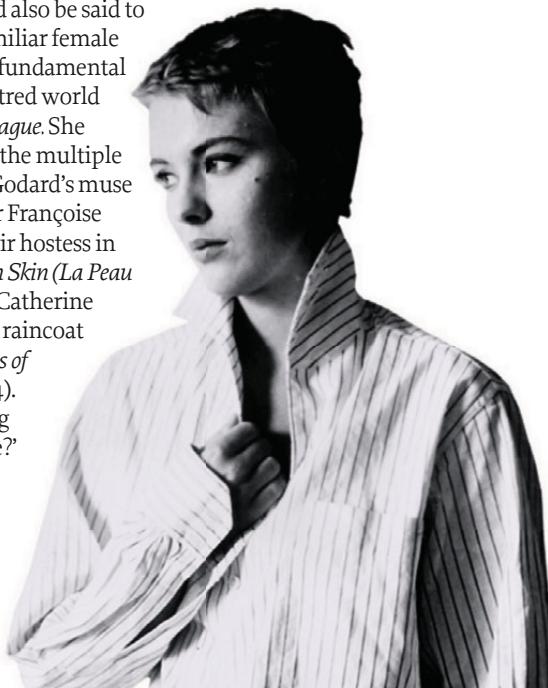


## 5 Jean

When Monsieur Oscar finds himself outside the now deserted, once grand Parisian department store La Samaritaine, he and his director are revisiting a significant part of the decor of *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*—and in its current sad state, the place now evokes a disused movie set. Oscar arrives there when his limo nearly collides with another, which is ferrying a beautiful young woman with short hair and a foreign accent—Kylie Minogue (above), inhabiting the iconic image of Jean Seberg in Godard's *Breathless* (1960, below). As a character who's called both Jean and Eva Grace, she could also be said to embody the familiar female object of desire fundamental to the male-centred world of the *nouvelle vague*. She could be one of the multiple apparitions of Godard's muse Anna Karina, or Françoise Dorléac as the air hostess in Truffaut's *Silken Skin* (*La Peau douce*, 1964), or Catherine Deneuve in her raincoat in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). (Minogue's song 'Who Were We?' is orchestrated and delivered along the lines of a lament

from a Jacques Demy musical.)

Of course Carax had his own muse in the 1980s, Juliette Binoche, for whom this role was apparently originally conceived. Jean/Eva says she and Oscar (a white-haired Lavant) haven't met for 20 years—the time when Binoche and Lavant made *Les Amants* together; now she is torn in love and fated to suffer a terrible end. (And Seberg herself, incidentally, was tragically found dead in an abandoned car.)



## 6 Masks

Céline, the faithful driver who takes Monsieur Oscar through his journey to the end of the night, is played by Edith Scob (above). The veteran French actress (whose role in *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* was mostly cut) was originally the discovery of director Georges Franju, who in *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les Yeux sans visage*, 1960) played on her fragile beauty by casting her as the disfigured victim of a car accident (below), whose crazed surgeon father attempts to restore her face with complete grafts from young women abducted by a loyal assistant, played by Alida Valli. Wandering alone in her father's mansion, Scob wears a hauntingly smooth mask identical to the one Carax asks her to don at the end of *Holy Motors*. (More obliquely, this artefact also features in

Tim Burton's *Batman*.)

Other references to *Eyes Without a Face* can be detected in *Holy Motors*: a white dove flies into the windscreens of the limo, recalling the birds released by Scob in Franju's poetic final images, while the shiny black coat she dons towards the end is similar to that worn by Valli.

After Céline leaves the garage (the 'Holy Motors' of the title) where all stretch limos rest for the night, the exhausted vehicles engage in conversation, their lights flashing as they speak. Pixar's animated film *Cars* (2006) may or may not be the inspiration here, but isn't the conceit nevertheless another pure invention of the cinema, in which mechanical objects—or even a sculpted mask—can assume the same potency as human beings?



Two decades on from Sylvester Stallone's clunky Hollywood incarnation of Judge Dredd, a new homegrown take on the helmeted futuristic lawman from British director Pete Travis and writer Alex Garland is truer to the raw, borderline-psychotic spirit of the '2000AD' comic-strip original

By Kim Newman

# A SENSE OF DREDD

Like the Dandy's hulking, huge-chinned cowboy Desperate Dan, the futuristic lawman Judge Dredd is a particularly British caricature of an American hero – half mocking, half admiring, deliberately bulked up to feature in tall tales. Created by writer John Wagner and artist Carlos Ezquerra, Dredd first appeared in 1977 in Prog 2 of the British weekly comic *2000AD*, straddling an armoured patrol bike and wielding a very big gun. Dredd's milieu – the post-apocalyptic sprawl of Mega-City One, which encapsulates Eastern cities from Boston to New York to Washington – is a synthesis of the urban jungles of 1970s vigilante-vs-chaos movies like the *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry* series, and even the hellish New York of *Joe* (1970) or *Taxi Driver* (1976); but it's also Dickensian London extrapolated into a science-fictional setting.

At once judge, jury and executioner, Judge Dredd is given to catchphrases like "I am the Law" as he dispenses street justice, firm in his conviction that he can never be wrong about a perp. Dressed up in fetishist black leather, with a helmet he never takes off, Dredd is an unashamedly fascist concept. Even in the ultra-violent, black-and-white-hats world of the strip, he is plainly so exaggerated a response to violent crime that the reader is prompted – along with an array of supporting characters ranging from a soon-written-out comedy robot valet to the psychically gifted female Judge Anderson – to view him as a bit of a dick. Still, we have to admit that, at certain times of night, in certain parts of town, even cringeing wet liberals would like to act like him.

As the strips proliferated, Wagner – and other writers, including Alan Grant and Pat Mills – explored the world of the Mega-Cities and their vertical tower-block communities named for whoever a given writer thought sounded right (somewhere in Mega-City One is Jack Yeovil Block, named after my pseudonym), and the wastelands beyond (The Cursed Earth). Dredd was set

against more and more bizarre foes, the most grotesque of whom is Judge Death, a skeletal visitor from a dimension where life itself has been declared against the law; like the rogue cops set against Dirty Harry in *Magnum Force* (1973), Death serves to underline the fact that even Dredd can recognise when others take his philosophy too far. For a character created to show a limited emotional response and stick undeviatingly to his rigid legal code – while never taking off his helmet – Dredd has lasted astonishingly well. Successive decades have imprinted themselves on his dystopian world, which seemed especially relevant during the so-called 'winter of discontent' – when the binmen's strike made British cities look like the rubbish-strewn Mega-Cities – and into the ruthless, Thatcherite 1980s.

Originally, the strip's depiction of law enforcement was informed by the contemporary urban thrillers of the 1970s, which ran to many adaptations of Joseph Wambaugh's encomiums for out-of-control cops, sporting titles like *The New Centurions* (1972) and *The Blue Knight* (1973). Obviously, dystopian future thrillers like *Soylent Green* (1973) and *The Ultimate Warrior* (1975) were in the mix too, but any debt to the movies was immediately paid back as *Dredd*-influenced futuristic cop/vigilante/anarchist franchises arose, not least George Miller's *Mad Max* films, John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981) and Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (1987). Not only do the leather-clad, cynical, unshaven or robotic heroes of these films owe a kinship to the Judges, but their typical enemies – vicious mutant lowlife scum – reflect the kind of perps Dredd habitually executed on the page.

## A BRITISH TRADITION

Though the works of Northampton's Alan Moore have been plundered by Hollywood over the past decade, successful homegrown adaptations of



## METAL HEAD

Like the comic-book character – and unlike Sylvester Stallone's 1995 incarnation – Karl Urban's Judge Dredd never removes his helmet



*As a physical representation of the world of the comics, it's remarkably successful – this doesn't look like any other futuristic hell city on film*

**NEW GIRL ON THE BLOCK**  
Like many a macho law enforcer before him, Dredd finds himself partnered with a young woman, Judge Anderson (Olivia Thirlby)



British comics remain thin on the ground: Joseph Losey's camp *Modesty Blaise* (1966) is probably the highest-profile effort, while films featuring Dan Dare, Garth, Roy of the Rovers or Robot Archie are conspicuous by their absence. So it was by no means inevitable that Dredd would join Batman, Superman, Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy and their American brethren on the big screen. Danny Cannon's *Judge Dredd* (1995) is likely to be remembered as the version that got it wrong, simply by virtue of letting Sylvester Stallone take his helmet off after the first reel – though a bigger problem was taking the story out of the Mega-City into the mutant-haunted wasteland before the world was particularly well established. It seemed likely that the failure of *Judge Dredd* (which does have some good qualities and should be acknowledged for its still-rare onscreen crediting of every single writer or artist who created a character or concept used in the film) would bury the character's chances of a film franchise.

However, a generation on, the flop has got its reboot. In this case, that means stripping out Hollywood elements (a 'personal story' for Dredd) that cluttered the earlier film and, most of all, insisting that Karl Urban's Dredd keep his helmet on throughout – though director Pete Travis (*Vantage Point*) often uses reflections on his visor to take the edge off the hero's blank aspect. Frankly, as with Desperate Dan, no human being can really hope to play Dredd – the nearest casting might have been a granite-jawed 1960s TV western star like Chuck Connors. Fans might wish Urban were a foot taller and wider at the shoulders, but he presents exactly the right silhouette, and manages a Clint Eastwood croak deeper and more gravelly than Christian Bale's Batman voice.

Judge Anderson (Olivia Thirlby), the rookie who's partnered with Dredd, has psychic powers, and the film's subtlest joke is the fact that she never needs to use them on him – even with his eyes invisible, it's plain what Dredd is thinking at any moment, because it's always a combination of righteous disgust, narrow-focused determination and incipient violence. Dredd

just doesn't have an emotional range; he feels no grief or shame or doubt. And screenwriter Alex Garland (see opposite) knows enough to take that as a given, rather than trying to import the sort of issues or developments screenwriting gurus insist are an indispensable part of the process. Too many comic-book adaptations – or big, hero-centered movies – default to the origin story or a conflict with an arch-enemy, but *Dredd* presents just another day on the job in Mega-City, albeit with the probationary Judge Anderson along on a regular call-out; villain Ma-Ma (Lena Headey), a scarred drugs queenpin, has never even heard of the Judge who sets out to bring (or throw) her down.

Though this is a film with a human blunt instrument as its protagonist, it still offers character arcs. Anderson may learn to apply brutality in order to hold back the chaos and protect the innocent, but she will never wipe out her conscience, while Dredd changes his opinion of her – something we believe he has never done (or been able to do) before. Early on in the film, Dredd tells her that failure in any one of a number of categories will mean an automatic fail in her probationary period. At one point in the course of their action-packed day, she admits that she's already failed by "losing control of [her] primary weapon" – though Dredd couldn't have known about the incident when a thug took away her signature gun. At the end, he approves her anyway – and the clipped screenplay leaves it up to the audience to see the loophole: that Dredd has realised Anderson's primary weapon isn't her gun but her mind.

#### A NEW DYSTOPIA

This version of Mega-City One uses augmented vistas of Cape Town for its exteriors, but the story gets inside a tower block much like the one in the recent action film *The Raid*, and proceeds to pit its trapped heroes against enemies on every side. As a physical representation of the world of the comics, it's remarkably successful – this doesn't look much like any other futuristic hell city on film. DP Anthony Dod Mantle, who worked on the Garland-scripted *28 Days Later...*, and composer Paul Leonard-Morgan make interesting choices, which mean that the film doesn't look or sound like, say, *RoboCop* (not to mention *Judge Dredd*). In fact Mantle, who cut his teeth on Dogme projects like *Festen*, has pulled off the most imaginative use of 3D in the recent cycle, narrowing the frame size so a slow-motion blood spatter can seem to rain on the audience, distorting dimensions so that convex faces become concave in Anderson's surreal headspace, and slowing down time – as he did in the prologue of Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* – to convey the effect of Ma-Ma's drug product (aptly named Slo-Mo).

The Judges may speak properly and politely at all times, almost like Dixon of Dock Green with a Harry Callahan accent, but overall *Dredd* is notably tougher than recent US superhero movies in terms of language and creative carnage, delivering the kind of material done so well in the near-psychotic glory days of *2000AD* – which was to regular comics what the Sex Pistols were to rock music.

**i** 'Dredd' is released in the UK on 7 September, and is reviewed on page 76



GETTY IMAGES (1)

## A MATTER OF JUDGEMENT

Alex Garland (above) didn't just write the script of 'Dredd' – he's also one of the producers, and has ensured the film remains faithful to the spirit of '2000AD'

Interview by David Jenkins

When *Trainspotting* producer Andrew Macdonald optioned Alex Garland's hit 1996 novel *The Beach*, it marked the start of an unusually productive collaboration. Garland didn't write the screenplay for the 2000 film of *The Beach*, but he has gone on to script four features for the producer, of which the latest is *Dredd*, on which Garland gets a producer credit alongside Macdonald too. Given his propensity for offering idiosyncratic riffs on classic genre material in *28 Days Later...* (2002) and *Sunshine* (2007), Garland was a natural fit to adapt the *2000AD* comic strip *Judge Dredd*. Collaborating closely with John Wagner, one of the creators of the original Dredd character, Garland's script offers a paean to the grungy, subversive and violent action movies of vintage-era John Carpenter and Walter Hill, while righting some of the many wrongs perpetrated by Danny Cannon's Hollywood *Judge Dredd* (1995).

**David Jenkins: The Sylvester Stallone 'Judge Dredd' was largely dismissed by fans. Did you take anything positive away from it?**

**Alex Garland:** I saw that movie when it came out, and I saw it as a Judge Dredd fan. This was long before I ever would've imagined I'd have been writing my own Dredd film. In the

original comic strip, the different writers and artists would present the Dredd character in a wide variety of styles, modes and tones. I just saw that film as being one of those tonal variations. I wasn't ashamed of it – it just wasn't the kind of *Dredd* I could engage with.

One of the things that the 1995 film got wrong is that you see Dredd with his helmet off. More important to me than some of the violence and transgression was the fact that you're never supposed to see Dredd's face. People got very angry with that.

**DJ: The tone of the strips was quite violent and subversive, and yet they still attracted a young audience.**

**AG:** When I was 11 or 12, reading those comics was the equivalent of seeing an X-rated film. It was violent, but it was also very witty and intelligent – I missed a lot of the jokes and a lot of the satire when I was a kid. Also, there was a particular atmosphere in the UK during the

*In the script it was absolutely clear that this was a film with a lot of drug use and a lot of violence*

late 70s which led to things like the birth of punk, and in some ways I think *2000AD* fitted into that sensibility.

**DJ: With this film you've retained that sensibility. Was there ever any pressure from producers to tone down the violence?**

**AG:** In this particular instance, that kind of pressure didn't exist. This was an independent movie that was pre-sold to territories across the globe. All of the distributors bought it on the basis of the script and the people who were making it. In the script it was absolutely clear that this was a film with a lot of drug use and a lot of violence, so whoever saw it would know they were in 18-certificate/R-rated territory without watching a frame. When we sent it to the BBFC, we received back from them a list of instructions to follow if we wanted to make it a 12A, and it was something like 27 separate cuts. We just laughed.

**DJ: Unlike, say, Batman in 'The Dark Knight Rises', Judge Dredd himself is never adopted as a mouthpiece for the film's political subtext. Was it tough to create that ambiguity?**

**AG:** One of the things about the original *Dredd* strip which is integral to the film is that, on one level, it operates as a strange commentary on fascist wish-fulfilment – even though most of the people making this film have what you might call a liberal sensibility. I'm not a fascist. You have a cop who kills people without any judicial due process, and the people he is killing are drug users who live in huge high-rise slums – I don't think you have to do anything more than that to start a conversation.

**DJ: Characters in the film take a new designer drug called Slo-Mo, which alters their perception of time, and this translates into one of the film's most distinctive visual motifs.**

**Was this in your original script?**

**AG:** Yes, a detailed description of the effects of Slo-Mo was in the script. There were lots of conversations with Anthony Dod Mantle, the DP, and Jon Thum, the visual-effects supervisor, in order to get that druggy, iridescent, super-high imagery right. It was all about combining the in-camera photography and the CG work, and tests began in very early pre-production. But they worked on it throughout, and even five minutes before the final grading was done, Anthony, Jon and I were still tweaking those shots. It was the single hardest thing to do in the film, but it was also the most satisfying.

**DJ: It's odd to hear of a writer being so close to the technical minutiae of production.**

**AG:** I've always been involved in the films I write. For a script like *Sunshine*, you're trying to tell a story about people who are hypnotised by images of the sun – the visual qualities of the sun were absolutely integral to the narrative. When I was creating the concept for *Dredd*, I had a very clear idea about how I wanted to go about it. It would've been foolish of me not to have worked on it.

*Setting hillbilly bootleggers against the forces of the state, the moonshiner film is a rural subgenre of the Hollywood gangster movie with a lively and largely disreputable history – and it's back with a vengeance in its bloodiest incarnation yet courtesy of the Nick Cave-scripted 'Lawless'*

By Michael Atkinson

**John Hillcoat's 'Lawless' is by any measure** a sturdy, refreshingly unhyperactive, actor-packed, gun-toting piece of genre pulp. But it also self-consciously revives a breed of movie long lost to the windy weather patterns of fashion: the moonshiner film. I never gave a thought before to how this strange little subgenre, so entangled with specific and odd American legislation and reactionary history and the very American instinct for scofflawry, might play to audiences elsewhere in the world. Other nations have crime genres specific to their time and place and lawbooks, but no one else has had Hollywood, and so the moonshiner – like the Prohibition gangster alongside him – is both a morality-lesson scarecrow and a glorified rebel-yell antihero for the ages, a dangerous fool and an object of macho corn-fed glamour, transformed into a national totem almost by the time he hooked up his first still and outran his first lawman on the back roads of Virginia.

It wouldn't be the first or last time American culture thought a little too well of its own criminal underclass, a pathological tendency it picked up from the British (beginning, probably, with the rousing mythologisation of open-seas piracy in 1724 with the pseudonymous Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*, which precipitated the pirate genre in fiction that followed and rages on still). In 19th-century America the mantle was passed via dime novels to western outlaws; you could, it seemed, be regarded as a loveable all-American rascal if you murdered lawmen and held up banks on the frontier. Had any other nation adopted as a cultural tenet the basic

principle of right-to-homicide, fuck-the-law, stand-your-ground 'liberty'? Hollywood sold the spirit of the idea to the world, and you could say it's one of cinema's less auspicious gifts to mankind: a social relativism that heroises the outlaw rule-breaker and his loaded firearms.

The moonshiner/bootlegger – defined as a cocky 20th-century mountain peasant with no education, flouting the government somewhere in the woods and swamps between West Virginia and Florida – was not, as you'd think, precisely a product of the 18th Amendment of 1919, which officially initiated Prohibition. Gangsterism, as it became known, blossomed thereafter given the opportunity (differing from the urban gangs of the pre-WWI era only in scope and organisation), but the moonshiner had existed in real life and in movies before that, just as Prohibition as a social movement had buzzed along town by town since the mid-19th century. The conflict goes back to Alexander Hamilton's Whiskey Act of 1791, which sought to burden 'private' whisky-still production with a 'luxury' tax, and which incited a resistance in the new nation that came to a violent head three years later. Tax collectors were tarred and feathered (a flourish realised, rather gruesomely, in *Lawless*), and eventually the uprising had to be put down by George Washington's 13,000-man militia – the new country's first act of civil repression.

Making trash-mash booze yourself for sale, without licence and without taxation, was an American pastime long before 1919, and long after the amendment's repeal in 1933; and before and after Prohibition got every branch of law enforcement involved, the moon-



**FIGHTING SPIRIT**  
Distinct from Prohibition-era gangster films such as 'Little Caesar', below, the moonshine film stretches from 1938's 'Thunder Road', above, to latest incarnation 'Lawless', right

# THE MOONSHINE BOYS





BETTER CALL SAUL (PHOTO: JEFF COOPER/AMC)

shiner's most hated foe was always 'the reveno-  
er'. Hollywood loved it from the beginning, and  
plenty of pre-1919 two-reelers exploited the dynamic,  
including Allan Dwan's *Red Margaret, Moonshiner* (1913)  
and no fewer than two comedies titled *In a Prohibition  
Town* (1914 and 1916), exploiting the comic potential in  
being tragically waylaid within the borders of an inde-  
pendently dry municipality.

All Prohibition did was simply raise the stakes on  
both sides of the law, and of course movies made a meal  
of it, if at first only exploring the matter of alcohol's il-  
legal acquisition and overconsumption. The reform-  
able alcoholic and one-time comic drunk were the food  
chain's pre-eminent figures, until Josef von Sternberg's  
*Underworld* (1927) established the moonshine-network-  
ing gangster as Prohibition's new Richard III, devilishly  
tommy-gunning his way through the wet, studio-set  
streets of Chicago and New York. Dramas like the Norma  
Shearer vehicle *The Bootleggers* (1922) and even animated  
shorts like the Mutt and Jeff cartoon *The Rum Runners*  
(1920) began to explore the moonshiner's role in popular  
culture, but the prevalent attitude towards the tensions  
of Prohibition was resolutely consumer-side, and titles  
like *More Bad News for the Thirsty* (1930) and *The Face on  
the Barroom Floor* (1932) were more commonplace. If you  
take movies as a sign, only the Scandinavian countries  
had as fraught a relationship with alcohol during the na-  
scent days of cinema.

Scenarios from the 1920s and early 1930s found more  
glamour and irony in the production of city-dwellers'  
'bathtub gin' than the Appalachians' backwoods corn  
whiskey, but this was when the paradigm began to form.  
Among American types, the hillbilly on the porch, with  
a threatening shotgun across his lap and his finger on  
the trigger, was the sort of iconic figure that people only  
needed to see a couple of times before it became a bona  
fide cliché – another exotic variety of regional wildlife  
that seemed immediately familiar to moviegoers, along-  
side the heroic frontier sheriff, the pelt-reaping moun-  
tain man, the gum-snapping urban vamp and the sple-  
netic Irish or Italian immigrant.

The Prohibition gangster, fully formed and yet electric-  
ally fresh to audiences in *Little Caesar* (1930) and *The  
Public Enemy* (1931), became his own zeitgeist, but the  
moonshiner had to wait until the reflectiveness of the  
years after World War II, when movies began contemplat-  
ing American subcultures, provincialities and tribu-  
tarial lifestyles in earnest. The film that lallygagged into  
the breach was, of course, Arthur Ripley's *Thunder Road*  
(1958), in which Robert Mitchum and his son James play  
a pair of Kentucky brothers embroiled in the moonshine  
trade and suffering the pressures of both Treasury agents  
and rival gangsters. (*Lawless* borrows whole plot frames  
from *Thunder Road* as though they were archetypes, but-  
tressing them with an additional three-brothers tem-  
plate straight out of *The Godfather*.) A low-budget picture  
Mitchum had to co-produce himself, *Thunder Road* has  
become a signature genre piece and cult item in sub-  
sequent years; it may well be the first American movie con-  
tingent on outlaw car chases, which makes it the grand-  
daddy to an entire class of contemporary blockbuster.

But *Thunder Road*'s gritty, lazy-bones indie-ness tapped  
into the moonshiner's renegade allure, both by contem-  
porising the action into the post-Prohibition present (the

story was based on a true event from the early 1950s),  
when commerce laws were the only legal obstacle to the  
bootleggers' life, and by subtly indexing the quasi-heroic  
vibe inherent in the Prohibition-era desperado, who in a  
sense fought for the common want. (The 18th Amend-  
ment had been largely a rural 'red state' campaign sup-  
ported by strict Protestantism, and the exploding popu-  
lations in the cities and ballooning suburbs voiced little  
support for it as the years wore on.) By the time *Thunder  
Road* appeared – followed by *The Purple Gang* (1959),  
which thrilled to the fate of the very real titular bootleg-  
ging mob from the 1920s – a new youth audience bedaz-  
zled by anti-authoritarianism in all of its forms was ready  
to bite the hook, and a new American myth was born.

#### BOOTLEG GENERATIONS

If anything, John Hillcoat's film seems less nostalgic  
about the 1920s and 30s than it is about the 1960s and  
70s, when roseate evocations of moonshiners got folded  
into a pervasive general wave of fascination for all things  
20s and 30s, including gangsters, hillbilly feuds, flapper  
decadence, Lost Generation cool, the early years of jazz  
and folk and baseball, Hammettian detectives, dustbowl  
poverty, vaudeville, bank-robbing and ragtime. When  
we think about the Prohibition years, these are the im-  
ages that leap to mind, shot with a soft-edged Robert  
Surtees brightness and openly entranced with the then-  
new movie-production possibilities of exploring real  
country roads, using real locations that hadn't changed  
in 50 years, and dressing up in period duds with running-  
board Fords and Browning semi-automatics.

Characteristically, it was Herschell Gordon Lewis  
who cashed in early, with the ultra-cheap exploitationer  
*Moonshine Mountain* (1964). A small flood of drive-in/  
grindhouse 'hicksploration' fare followed, fuelled by  
the potential for violence in the subgenre, as well as by

*Thunder Road*'  
may well be the  
first American  
movie contingent  
on outlaw car  
chases, which  
makes it the  
granddaddy to  
an entire class  
of blockbuster

**STRONG ARM OF THE LAW**  
In the moonshine film, the  
forces of the state are there  
to be outwitted or reviled,  
as in the case of Special  
Deputy Charley Rakes (Guy  
Pearce, below) in 'Lawless'





PHOTOFEST NYC (O) KOBAL COLLECTION (C)

stereotypical ideas about dim-witted, underclothed, sexually available mountain women. (The ads for 1968's *Moonshiner's Woman* hollered that it "makes *Thunder Road* look like an ice cream social!") The pioneering Hollywood launch into these dusty environs – *The Moonshine War* (1970), adapted from and by Elmore Leonard, and directed by Hollywood stalwart Richard Quine – was a full-on MGM release, starring Richard Widmark and Patrick McGoohan. Like Richard Sarafian's all-star feudin'-Tennessee-clans drama *Lolly-Madonna XXX* (1973), Quine's film seemed risible and patronising and drew little attention. Perhaps the subgenre was too disreputable, too low-down, to be successfully co-opted by Hollywood?

The hit Burt Reynolds enjoyed with *White Lightning* (1973) changed all that – but here the waters muddied further, since the film posits Reynolds's studly good ol' boy Gator McLusky as an ex-con roped into helping Feds battle a moonshining gang in 1972 Arkansas. At the height of the Nixon Administration and the Vietnam War, ticket-buyers somehow didn't seem to have a problem accepting untaxed moonshine as a major problem (indeed, the film warranted a sequel, *Gator*, in 1976); today, however, the strange (if not strictly anachronistic) juxtaposition recalls the later films in Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes series, when Holmes was suddenly transposed without explanation to the mid-20th century. In hindsight, the true imperative of *White Lightning* – besides exploiting Reynolds's apelike *savoir faire* – seems to have been to festoon the moonshiner-vs-the law scenario with new cars, like Gator's souped-up '71 Ford Galaxy, tearing down those overgrown country byways.

Many of the moonshine movies that followed were campy time travel like Roger Corman's *Big Bad Mama* (1974) and Stanley Donen's overbudgeted *Lucky Lady* (1975). But many gutbucket pulp items were lazily and often inexplicably set in a real-seeming but fantastical contemporary American South of 180-proof crime and car chases. A signature item, Gus Trikonis's *Moonshine County Express* (1976), not only featured the saucy fabulosity of Playmate/cult star Claudia Jennings (who died in a car crash shortly after filming) but also helped spawn a long-running TV series, *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-85), itself a bizarre daydream of muscle cars and gingham halter tops that has little to do with moonshine and everything to do with the homogenised iconography that has sprouted around it. Here, as always,

the rumrunner is just an adorable and harmless bandit evading the evil and usually corpulent county sheriffs and Treasury bastards – a syndrome that's as hard to defend as it is to craft into a meaningful American subtext.

Are moonshiner movies just inherently dumb? *Lawless* goes back to the well, and revels in the shallow water there – particularly Guy Pearce's Special Deputy Charley Rakes, an eyebrowless, dandified Chicago sadist whose character excesses rival any found in the movies' history of broad caricatures and outrageous Southern accents. Still, the moonshine film may be one of the few semi-legitimate American subgenres that manages to survive today – in at least occasional explosions of nostalgia-fed nostalgia – and still not count on its shelf a single ersatz masterpiece. (Sure, *Once upon a Time in America* involves Prohibition hooch mobsters, but its meaningful interfaces with the moonshiner film are few.)

The biker flick has *The Wild One* (1953) and *Easy Rider* (1969); the rodeo film has Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972); even rail-riding Depression hobo-dom has Robert Aldrich's underappreciated *The Emperor of the North Pole* (1973). But the moonshiner film remains a black-sheep brand with no notable auteur or signal work, sullied as it was at first by disrepute and ludicrous cliché, and later by the ironic distanciation of cyclical nostalgic opportunism. Or were the hicks just too hick for the rest of us?

*Lawless* was scripted by Nick Cave, whose flair for overripe Southern Gothic has already been demonstrated in his 1989 novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and countless song lyrics, not least on the 1996 album *Murder Ballads*; as a screenwriter, Cave has previously collaborated with director Hillcoat on the Australian western *The Proposition* (2005) and the long-neglected prison movie *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* (1988). Given this interesting provenance, it's disappointing that *Lawless* turns out to be a straight-faced gloss rather than the more graphic surgery a reinvention or rediscovery requires. It's not a Tarantino, in other words – nor is it a deep-dish reconception of subculture history such as *There Will Be Blood*. Ah well, perhaps in the end the moonshiners' story is simply too absurd, too alcoholic, too dependent on short-sighted tomfoolery and idiotic lawmaking and a self-glorifying American provinciality that has in real terms done far more damage than good to the country's wellbeing.



**'Lawless' is on release in UK cinemas, and was reviewed in the September issue**

**LIGHTNING CONDUCTORS**  
**Burt Reynolds as Gator**  
**McKlusky in 'White**  
**Lightning' (1973), above;**  
**'The Purple Gang' (1959), left**

# The Owl's Legacy

## In Memory of Chris Marker (1921-2012)

*Chris Marker, who died in July, was so much more than just a 'documentary filmmaker'. He was photographer, essayist, activist, cartoonist, interactive pioneer – and mentor. Over the next seven pages, 'S&S' pays tribute*  
**By Catherine Lupton plus overleaf**  
**Agnès Varda, Patricio Guzmán, Chris Petit, José Luis Guérin, Patrick Keiller and more**

**TRACES OF A LIFE**  
A rare photograph of the famously camera-shy Chris Marker, right; above, examples of the graffiti that's appeared in Paris since his death in July

**For a few brief hours** after news of Chris Marker's death on 29 July (his 91st birthday) began filtering around the world, he trended on Twitter second only to the Olympics. It seemed both apt and astonishing that Marker, notoriously so elusive and for many decades one of cinema's best-kept insider secrets, should have touched the popular heart of this most frivolous and incisive of social-media platforms. For at the core of Marker's gift as a pioneering multimedia artist, cinematic essayist and relentlessly elegant navigator of the deep structures of memory was his ability to fuse light-hearted enchantment with political acuity, honouring the need for both as indispensable responses to the swift shape-shifting of the modern world.

Chris Marker as we know him first emerged as a writer and cultural commentator in late-1940s Paris. He wrote on a variety of topics for journals like *Esprit* and *Cahiers du cinéma*, and published longer works including a novel, *The Forthright Spirit* (*Le Coeur net*, 1949). Marker's first steps as a filmmaker came in the early 1950s: an educational film about the 1952 Helsinki Olympics and *Statues Also Die* (*Les statues meurent aussi*, 1953), a powerful and poetic indictment of the consequences of European imperialism in Africa, co-directed with Alain Resnais – and banned by the French government.

With Resnais and Agnès Varda, Marker became identified in the later 1950s with the so-called Left Bank group of the French New Wave, distinguished from the critics-turned-filmmakers of *Cahiers du cinéma* by sharper allegiances to literature, art, photography and documentary. Marker's early reputation as a film essayist was sealed in this period by a run of engaging, perceptive personal travelogues: *Sunday in Peking* (*Dimanche à Pékin*, 1956), *Coréennes* (1957 – which just happens to be a book), *Letter*

*from Siberia* (*Lettre de Sibérie*, 1957), *Description of a Struggle* (*Description d'un combat*, 1960) and *Cuba Si!* (1961), which tapped the complex identities of nations in rapid and bewildering transition to new roles in the Cold War world.

His reputation established, Marker confounded it. For *Le joli mai* (1962) he augmented personal commentary with the interactive engagement of *cinéma vérité*, conducting interviews with a cross-section of Parisians to gauge the state of his home nation in the aftermath of the Algerian War. Except that Marker preferred "ciné, ma vérité" ("cinema, my truth"), holding subjective perception in lively tension with the quasi-scientific objectivity that *cinéma vérité* was often assumed to promise. From the shadows of *Le joli mai* came Marker's best-known and most widely seen film, the inimitable science-fiction classic *La Jetée* (1962). This piercing story of loss, memory and infatuation is composed almost entirely of still images, and in a mere 29 minutes strips the elaborate mechanics of the narrative fiction film down to their bare bones.

The mid-1960s saw Marker briefly return to the personal travelogue for *The Koumiko Mystery* (*Le Mystère Koumiko*, 1965), the first of his many fascinated encounters with Japan, and further explore the terrain of the photofilm in *If I Had Four Camels* (*Si j'avais quatre dromadaires*, 1966). Then in 1967 the decade's social and political ferment propelled his work in a new direction. Beginning with his involvement in the collective anti-Vietnam War protest film *Far from Vietnam* (*Loin du Viêt-nam*, 1967), Marker immersed himself in radical political and countercultural filmmaking, ceasing to sign his work and instead operating within the collectives SLON and ISKRA to report on the course of liberation struggles in France, Latin America, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Key films from this period include *The Battle of the Ten Million*



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2) / GRAFFITI PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES GILBERT & SELLOMA

(*La Bataille des dix millions*, 1970) – a reportage on Cuba's push for a mammoth sugar harvest – and *Embassy* (1973), a haunting super-8 reimagining-with-a-twist of the fate of Chilean political activists who sought refuge in foreign embassies following the US-backed military coup.

In 1977, Marker released *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (later known as *A Grin Without a Cat*), a sweeping, magisterial reflection in montage on the rise and fall of 1960s radicalism at key touchpoints around the world. Guided by a hunch that, seen with hindsight, the outtakes of militant films might hold clues to the unconscious dynamics of the history they'd been recording, Marker conjured with a breathtaking array of footage and a multi-voice commentary to convey this history as a tangle of competing perspectives, glaring contradictions and messily unfinished business.

The reappearance of Marker's name in the credits of *A Grin Without a Cat* – and the film's few but telling feline asides – heralded his decisive return to personal filmmaking in *Sans soleil* (*Sunless*, 1982), a landmark of the cinematic essay, and with *La Jetée* the film for which Marker is best known. In *Sans soleil* an unseen woman reads and comments upon letters she receives from a globetrotting cameraman, Sandor Krasna, who journeys obsessively to Japan, West Africa, Iceland, the Ile de France and the San Francisco locations of *Vertigo*. Ostensibly in search only of banality, the persona of Krasna fuses Marker the essayist and Marker the militant filmmaker to offer a breathtakingly virtuosic meditation on time, place, memory, history and the act of representation.

*Sans soleil*'s allusive, fugue-like form and interludes of video synthesiser-treated imagery anticipated Marker's gleeful embrace of new digital media technologies from the 1980s onwards. He happily diversified into producing video works for television – the most substantial of which include *The Last Bolshevik* (*Le Tombeau d'Alexandre*, 1993), a portrait of the Soviet director Alexander Medvedkin, and *The Owl's Legacy* (*L'Héritage de la chouette*, 1988), a 13-part series on the significance of Ancient Greek civilisation in the modern world. He also created gallery-based multimedia installations such as *Zapping Zone* (1990), *Silent Movie* (1995) and *Owls at Noon* (2004). His fascination with digital hypermedia as the ideal vehicle for exploring memory found shape in the network-inspired documentary/fiction film *Level Five* (1996), before culminating in the interactive CD-Rom *Immemory* (1997).

Marker's longstanding activity as a photographer recently found new prominence with the book and exhibition *Staring Back* (2007) and the 2011 exhibition *Passengers*. Meanwhile he continued to chip in to the frontiers of Web 2.0, issuing his regular collage/cartoon Poptronics blog from 2007 until 2010, appearing in the online virtual world Second Life in the guise of his beloved cat Guillaume-en-Egypte, and releasing online in 2006 a humble cat-and-mouse home video, *Leila Attacks*, which intuited to perfection the coming era of virals.

It's too early to anticipate Chris Marker's legacy to the future – to do more than feel gingerly around the edges of the loss his death leaves us with. Yet much as Marker himself kept reworking *A Grin Without a Cat* – because he needed to ask what it still meant to later generations who'd watched the Berlin Wall fall and the tanks roll over Tiananmen Square – I can't resist wondering if and what his work whispers now to the generation of Occupy, to Gaza and Syntagma Square, to those facing the realities of climate change and ecocide – and asking whether there will be a future to leave any kind of legacy to.



# SANS MARKER

At once politically committed and intensely personal, Chris Marker's unique filmmaking style and practice have proved a huge inspiration for fellow filmmakers around the world, ten of whom share memories here of the work and the man

## JOHN GIANVITO

*US, 'Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind'*

Whether he's consciously an influence or not, anyone who's ventured into that loosely defined terrain of the 'essay documentary' anytime within the past 55 years owes a debt to Chris Marker. As pivotal as the impact that Dziga Vertov had on Marker himself ("the only teacher," Marker called him just a year ago), an axial connection to Marker can be discerned amidst the diverse trajectories of filmmakers like Patrick Keiller, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Adam Curtis, Lynne Sachs, Soon-Mi Yoo, Michael Shambrook, Patricio Guzmán and Marc Karlin – a filmmaker I discovered through Marker who's in need of the kind of reclamation Marker afforded the Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkin [in films such as *The Last Bolshevik*].

But how to define those attributes that made Marker so special? Attempting the impossible, here's my shortlist: attentiveness to details (of images, behaviour, historical records); formidable erudition guided by boundless curiosity; modesty; compassion; a fierce work ethic while maintaining a sense of play; the avoidance of cynicism; mental agility; craftsmanship; poetic imagination. It seems to me that it was this concoction that enabled Marker – the perennial space and time traveller – to so productively roam, question and synthesise such a vast array of human experience.

While I chafed in his later years at what I felt was Marker's naive and uncritical embrace of Obama, as well as his sojourns in the online labyrinth of Second Life, I remain deeply moved by Marker's investment in history and memory as sites of necessary contestation. By striving to be a global citizen, Marker – through his films, writings, photos – always managed to remind me of the myriad ways we are all connected (and not only to humans), and thus implicated in that predicament. That he did this largely without judgement and with frequent cheerfulness only adds to the mystique.

## JEM COHEN

*US, 'Chain', 'Instrument'*

When I first saw Forough Farrokhzad's astonishing (and only) film *The House Is Black* (1962) some time in the 1990s, I was hungry to share it with others, but at the time it was unavailable and seemed to me utterly mysterious. How could I never have even heard of this most singular work – a key missing monument in the unmapped lands of the lyrical essay film? Much later when I saw the DVD had come out,



**FROZEN MOMENT** Composed almost entirely of stills, 1962's 'La Jetée' is still Marker's best-known film

there on the back was a blurb from Marker and inside, his excellent comments. It turned out he'd championed her work for years, and had even known her. (Farrokhzad died in a car accident in 1967, at the age of 32).

Marker turned up in so many crucial places – and so far in advance – that it could seem uncanny, almost impossible: shooting [*Cuba Si!*] in Cuba just before the Bay of Pigs; arranging the first publication of William Klein's seminal book of New York street photos in 1956; smuggling filmstock to Patricio Guzmán in Chile just before the 1973 military coup; filming the anti-war demonstrations at the Pentagon in 1967; working with Bosnian refugees at their pirate TV studio in Slovenia in the early 1990s... On and on he seemed somehow always there, eventually if not in person then in spirit – witness the wonderful zen cat symbol he recently made for Occupy Wall Street.

On 29 July, honouring his 91st birthday (and unbeknown to myself and the world, the actual day of his death), I showed *The House Is*

*Black* to students. Farrokhzad's phrase "the owl in the ruins" jumped out at me and I suddenly flashed: "That's him. That's Marker. He's the owl in the ruins." That's how I think of him, perched above the wreckage of the 20th century (and alas, the 21st), carefully measuring its devastations and its beauties, flying so quietly from tree to lamppost to bombed-out steeple to Japanese TV aerial, sharp eyes to the ground.

I note the animal and not the man in part because Marker was notoriously private. It's true that he resisted presenting his films in person, almost never gave interviews, and didn't wish his photograph to be taken. But was he really so reclusive? Hardly. We live in an age so obsessed with celebrity that we can barely imagine a person not wanting or needing to be seen – a time where the ascendancy of social media (please don't call it a 'revolution') is too often just another way of saying that we're all supposed to be full-time self-publicists now, jockeying for position and 'likes' on Facebook. My guess is that Marker pushed fame away long ago in part because he just had more important work to do. He was incredibly busy, right up to the end, always trying to finish another film, to master a new technology, to rush out a fresh cartoon about current events. (Those cartoons were sometimes how I first heard about breaking news – even events in my own country!)

*He was incredibly busy, right up to the end, always trying to finish another film, to master a new technology*

Marker was, to so many, a living legend, yet I fear we discredit him if we place him high and solitary on any kind of pedestal. The Chris Marker who most moved me was not the mysterious genius (though I just can't deny there was some of that there) – it was the man who made do. Marker was a DIY renegade. His ability to make something powerful, multivalent, funny and timeless out of next to nothing gave the lie to the notion that 'real' filmmaking is the stuff of studios, big money, armies of technicians, focus groups, 'The Industry'. In other words, he – like Vertov and Vigo and Varda (and Ivens and Alvarez and many others) – brought filmmaking within reach.

He was his own industry, but it was an industry interlaced with comrades and co-workers. It wasn't that he disdained or rejected the other, more luxurious world of cinema (he loved many big movies and much American cable television). It was just that he drew from and carved out an entirely different lineage, coexistent but often stupidly marginalised, where all one needed was an eye, a camera, a recorder, some ideas – and the world. (But what an eye, and what ideas!) For such a master, his tech was occasionally crude – or, more appropriately, it felt handmade, about which he wasn't precious or apologetic. He cobbled things together and produced an astonishing amount (not only films but writing, stills, installations and the CD-Rom *Immemory*), always moving on to the next project rather than promoting the last. But make no mistake, Marker surely struggled to make his work and to make a living in a world that mostly did not share his guts or his values. We must not forget that he was a radical, in the finest, most hopeful sense of the word, and radicals don't have it easy here.

Marker knew that documentary filmmaking meant enquiry, free association and an awareness of all the other arts – books, music, painting and so on, out of which it breathed and reverberated. He also had great faith in new technology. He relished the internet, though not uncritically. I sometimes have the uncanny feeling – when the internet's at its best – that he must have invented it, this invisible labyrinth and library of endless possibilities. His open-mindedness is a great lesson to me. Where I was at first troubled by the virtual rabbit-hole of Second Life, he saw the potential for a movie theatre there, showing works that nobody else would distribute.

When I first encountered Marker in Paris, he indicated that we'd meet in the lobby of my hotel – and it didn't occur to me to say that I wasn't sure what he looked like. (Less of him had leaked onto the web back then.) I waited nervously in my room upstairs and then, glancing out of the window, saw a man crossing the street and knew immediately it was him. He moved with the ranging wariness that marks a lifelong street photographer –



**CAMERA EYE** An example of Marker's photographic work, from his series 'Passengers' (2008-10)

lean and loping, and somehow wild. He had a beautiful, strong face.

It wasn't exactly easy to meet someone whose work I cared so deeply about, but he proved kind, funny and humble. Beyond fascinating, yes, but not a legend to be feared. He was already around 80 but uncannily ageless. For someone so steeped in the day's news, so keenly on top of practically every blessed and bedevilled global eruption of resistance against tyranny, he did seem outside of time. And now he really is. I miss his concrete presence – the massive inspiration in just knowing he was out there on this broken planet, watching and working.

#### THOM ANDERSEN

##### *US, 'Los Angeles Plays Itself'*

Once, long ago – I can't remember where or when – I had the good fortune to see *A Valparaiso* (1963), directed by Joris Ivens with a text by Chris Marker. It is still the best city film I've seen, and it has one line (about Val-



**BUMPY ROAD** 'Description of a Struggle'

paraiso) I will always remember: "Its lie is the sun, its truth is the sea." That line was something to which I could aspire.

A good original epigram is a rare thing in movies. There are some in Godard's movies, but they are just emblems of thought. He doesn't care about their truth value. But Marker's epigrams are always convincing as well as unexpected.

I only had that one chance to see *A Valparaiso* projected. I've never had a chance to see most of his films, and others only many years after their original release. The political censorship we face in the United States has allowed only his more melancholy films, such as *Sans soleil*, to pass, while stopping his optimistic films, such as *Sunday in Peking*, *If I Had Four Camels* and *Cuba Si!*. Others were delayed until their usefulness had vanished.

I read a review of *Le fond de l'air est rouge* in *Variety* in 1977; I first saw it in 2002, when it was finally released in the US with a new title, *A Grin Without a Cat*, that reversed the connotations of the original. The grin is the armed revolutionary vanguard, and the cat is the people. The disillusioned leftist has for many years been a sympathetic figure in American culture. Marker, of course, didn't choose this role – it was falsely imposed on him in the US by selective sampling of his work.

So I can't write about his work; I can only quote a few images and phrases. Here is one that doesn't come from a film, but from a 2003 interview in *Libération*: "The exponential growth of stupidity and vulgarity [in television] is a concrete, quantifiable fact... and a crime against humanity." 

**PATRICK KEILLER**UK, 'London', *Robinson in Space*'

I first saw *La Jetée* during the winter of 1968-9, I think at the Arts Lab in Drury Lane. Wherever it was, it wasn't in a cinema, and I may not have gone there to see a film; it was in a late-night programme in which the films weren't individually listed, so that it came as a complete surprise. I saw it a few more times in similar circumstances in the months that followed, and although it never occurred to me to make anything like a film until about ten years later, *La Jetée* was one of a few films – *L'Atalante* was another – that I thought of very often. When I did attempt some architectural cinematography, it was *La Jetée* that encouraged me to think it might be possible to make something with the results.

One evening in July 1989 I went to see *Le joli mai* at the London Film-Makers' Co-op. Marker's film is a record of a 'moment' in Paris – a first month of peace after the end of the Algerian War. I wondered whether London might be about to experience a comparable 'moment' and, if so, whether this might enhance the possibility of making a film about the city, a subject I had until then considered too difficult.

As it turned out, we didn't photograph London until 1992 [when Keiller shot his film *London*], but that year, too, proved to be a 'moment' in the city's history.

**CHRIS PETIT**UK, 'Radio On', *Content*'

I saw *La Jetée* at the school film society in about 1965. It was one of those school film-society staples in the way *Incident at Owl Creek* was, and I remember being far more impressed by the Marker simply because of the radical thing of not using film and the moment of the blink, which was like the birth of cinema. I thought he made Orly airport look very cool. It's a very cool film.

He wasn't much around in the 1970s when I was a film critic at *Time Out* and it wouldn't have been until I saw *Sans soleil* at the Berlin Film Festival in 1982 that he came back into the frame for me. I couldn't recollect having seen anything like it; its obvious attraction was of this completely dismantled form of cinema, in that it was pretty much somebody making films by themselves. I do remember thinking, "My God, what you can do when you split the sound and image" – the freedom to make the film into whatever you wanted.

I may have been at Berlin with [Petit's 1981 feature] *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, which had been a fairly horrendous experience in that it was bog-standard English film production, and the epiphany on watching *Sans soleil* was that there were preferable ways of making films. Yet there was no example that I could think of working like that in the UK. The question was: would I rather make a film

**ANATOMY OF MILITANCY 'A Grin Without a Cat'****CO-WORKER 'A Valparaíso', made with Joris Ivens**

like that in terms of how it's made, or would I rather make a standard production? And the answer was pretty obvious. And when it came to making *The Falconer* [directed by Petit and Iain Sinclair, 1997], Marker's example of splitting sound and picture and not having to rely on synch sound was a pretty major realisation.

As a writer you often write to discover what it is you're writing about, so there's a process of discovery. Whereas filmmaking is in essence much more premeditated. I think Marker's films were close to writing in that he made them presumably in conditions of more or less total artistic freedom and he wasn't beholden to anyone. The thing I always found depressing about conventional filmmaking was that

*He turned up in so many places – and so far in advance – that it could seem uncanny: shooting in Cuba just before the Bay of Pigs*

it became about assembly and essentially all the decisions were made in advance. With Marker's films there was the feeling of a sense of discovery in the making of them.

I never met him, but my *Time Out* colleague Chris Peachment did. They were in Japan together when Marker was making *A.K.* (1985), his film about Kurosawa's *Ran*. He's got a picture of Marker taken out of a bus window on a foggy day. It must be one of the few!

Marker always demonstrated how little you actually needed in order to be a real filmmaker. As a figure he does stand way ahead of the technological revolution we're going through now. If you're starting out as a student filmmaker now you've got the camera, you've got the cutting equipment on a computer, so I suppose as a fairly unique essayist – a horrible word! – Marker is an obvious person to look to. In that respect, he was the first. You could argue that he was the most original of the New Wave, and he didn't seem to want the cover of *Paris Match* in the way that Godard did! Godard

**HISTORY IN THE MAKING Fidel Castro in 'Cuba Si!'**

and Chabrol and Truffaut were all excellent self-publicists. Marker struck me as more of a cosmonaut than the rest of the New Wave in the way he turned filmmaking into a strange combination of the collective and the solitary.

#### SARAH TURNER

UK, 'Perestroika'

The first Marker film I saw was *La Jetée* when I was an art student at Central Saint Martins in the 1980s. *La Jetée* is hugely experimental because it denies the basic modality of film. The essence of film is the moving image, and for me *La Jetée* works within the paradigm of experimental film because it counters certain fundamental conventions. What would it mean for the moving image to demand that we reflect on a moment and imagine around it? I think this is one of Chris Marker's legacies.

I also saw *Sans soleil* in the 1980s and I don't think I had the resources to understand it as a much younger artist. Back then I'm sure I was resistant to all the beautiful women staring into the lens! It's only when I've re-viewed it recently that I felt differently. Now I can better understand the value of what he was doing. He's an essayist with a very particular, very intellectual agenda. One of the things he's very good on is how we can't separate social experience from history. With the benefit of hindsight I see his analysis as hugely valuable.

His work is always about how the past is constructed through images, which are in themselves constructions, and that's the great gift he's given us – his analysis of the image archive and who 'frames' the stories within it. For me, this was extremely prescient, especially in *Letter from Siberia*, where he looks at how any narrative is also the experience of how it's 'framed'. I revisited *Letter from Siberia* when I was making *Perestroika* (2010). I was interested in the contemporary experience of amnesia and how, as someone born in the 1960s, my experience of the Soviet Union was as a form of political otherness – and a valuable form of otherness, depending on your political position. What happened post-1989 was the entire experience of political otherness basically collapsed in the Western world. The other thing I focused on in *Letter from Siberia* was the epistolary structure. It was much more than a literary game, and I felt that my duty to Chris Marker was to put that into another language – that of a psychic game.

He's a hugely important figure of Left consciousness. The other thing I value was that he was an 'anti-celebrity'. He constantly refused all of that, which makes him an extremely valuable mentor in our culture.

#### KODWO ESHUN

UK, 'Otolith I', 'II' & 'III', 'The Radiant'

In the relentless heat of June 2007, The Otolith Group [Eshun and Anjalika Sagar] conceived



INTIMATE LETTERS 'Sans soleil' heralded Marker's return to personal filmmaking

#### *'Sans soleil' was a completely dismantled form of cinema – it was pretty much somebody making films by themselves*

an idea to represent a 13-episode television series neither of us had ever seen in the form of a 13-monitor installation. The series was *The Owl's Legacy*, directed by Chris Marker, filmed in Tbilisi, Athens, Paris, Berkeley and Tokyo, with appearances from Iannis Xenakis, Michel Serres, Cornelius Castoriadis and others, screened on the Franco-German TV network ARTE in 1989 and on Channel 4 in 1991 (where it was voiced by Bob Peck). The context was 'Destroy Athens', the 1st Athens Biennale.

We sent an email proposal to Marker; he replied, two days later: "I am glad to hear you're interested in *The Owl*, but you do know it is banned in Greece, don't you?" Marker explained that the Onassis Foundation – one of Greece's most important cultural foundations, and one of the two main funders of *The Owl's Legacy* – had taken offence at George Steiner's statement that ancient Greece was nothing to do with modern Greece; that modern Greece was a farce and a joke. The foundation had demanded an apology. Marker gave them space to respond to Steiner, but the foundation were not content with this. They consistently refuse to grant ARTE permission for a DVD reissue of the series.

*The Owl's Legacy* is now widely available on gorgomancy.net and on vimeo; back in 2007 it was a disappeared project. Now that Marker has gone, what remains is his determination

to fight the foundation's censorship. When Marker sent us DVDs of *The Owl's Legacy* with his own hand-printed sleeves, he was bootlegging his own work, using the context of the Athens Biennale to fight the attitude of the Onassis Foundation. Because we agreed not to ask the foundation's permission to screen the series, or pay them, they could legally have closed down the installation and arrested us and the curators. Or they could ignore the entire event, which they in fact did.

Now that Marker has gone, what remains are details: the way he tested and encouraged us; his painstaking emails; his anger when we asked whether we could publish his emails; his pleasure that his work had been "brought back from Hades"; his refusal to allow the foundation's behaviour to overshadow his great, unseen work in the present, for the future.

#### JOSÉ LUIS GUERÍN

Spain, 'In the City of Sylvia'

If the fiction feature film has its equivalent in the 19th-century novel, where are the equivalents of travel books, memoirs, archives, biographies, essays, poetry, epistles, activism...? Chris Marker, more than any other filmmaker, has broadened the horizons of his own medium. That is how I used to present him to my students in the years when I made a living from teaching in the 1980s and the 90s. I used *The Train Rolls On* (*Le Train en marche*, 1971, about the Soviet director Alexander Medvedkin), one of those films that Marker later distanced himself from ideologically, to the point of hindering its visibility – but in which I thought I could discern the near-culmination of his art. It's been years since

Il last watched it, but I still remember by heart almost the whole of the voiceover commentary – the tone and the tempo of that voice, the astuteness of the pauses – and the emotion of discovering a new form of beauty, a new inventory in the confrontation between word and image, a new way of producing ideas.

This discovery at the beginning of the 1980s determined my desire for those forms of cinema that laziness confines to the term 'documentary', and which in my mind simply corresponded with 'free cinema'. Back then it was difficult to find interlocutors in my country with whom to share this revelation. But surprisingly – without having been exhibited, and thus having been effectively silenced by the mass media – Marker slowly started to become established as one of the central and most referenced figures for the young cinema.

His was an incorruptible poetics that would mutate into every possible format, from 35mm to domestic video, and at all lengths, from a four-hour-long fresco to a haiku of three minutes; that could develop under the sign of activism or science fiction; that could adopt the shape of a film, or of some photographs, or of a book or an installation... This versatile filmmaker without a face was able to circumnavigate those industry demands that often seemed insurmountable; he has slowly become the filmmaker most in tune with these new times, with the new uncertainties.

When it feels as if there's nothing left to do in cinema, Chris Marker turns up and shows us that everything is possible, even making a film with still photographs or in super 8 – or even not making it, but instigating it: Guzmán's *The Battle of Chile*, Ivens's *A Valparaíso, Far from Vietnam*, *Ciné Tracts*, Cuban documentary in the 1960s... Chris Marker has seen it all.

#### PATRICIO GUZMÁN

*Chile, 'The Battle of Chile', 'Nostalgia for the Light'*  
Chris Marker knocked at the door of my home in Santiago de Chile in May 1972. When I opened it I bumped into a very slim man who spoke Spanish with a Martian accent.

"I am Chris Marker," he said.

I moved back a few centimetres and stood there looking at him in silence. Through my head went some of the images of his film *La Jetée*, which I had seen at least 15 times.

We shook hands and I said: "Come on in."

Chris Marker entered the living room and waited until I invited him to sit down. He did not say anything. But I intuited from his weary gaze that he had not left the spacecraft in which he had landed properly parked.

From the first moment, Chris projected an alien image that never left him. He separated sentences with unexpected silences and spoke with a slight lisp, pressing his thin lips together, as if all earthly languages were foreign to him. He seemed very tall, although he wasn't



CAT PEOPLE Agnès Varda with Marker's alter ego Guillaume-en-Egypte in 'Agnès de ci de là Varda'

*He chose to make himself known by his work and not by his face. He chose the drawing he made of his cat to represent him*

particularly. He dressed in an indescribable way. He was like an elegant worker. His face was long and thin, his eyes slightly oriental, his head shaved, and his ears like those of Doctor Spock.

"I liked your film," he told me.

I was overwhelmed with a feeling of terror, a mixture of insecurity and respect. Not so long before, I had finished *El primer año* (*The First Year*) – my first feature documentary, about the first 12 months of Allende's government.

"I came to Chile with the intention of filming a cinematographic chronicle," Marker confessed. "Since you've already made it, I'd rather buy it from you and exhibit it in France."

It's been 40 years since that conversation, and it's only recently that I realised that it



THE WAR IS OVER Paris, May 1962, in 'Le joli mai'

marked my life forever, since my modest amateur career in film made an enormous U-turn from that very moment.

#### AGNÈS VARDÀ

*France, 'Cleo from 5 to 7', 'The Beaches of Agnès'*  
We're going to miss Chris Marker.

He first entered my life in 1954, as a voice. He used to telephone Resnais, who was editing my first film.

His intelligence, toughness and tenderness have been one of my joys throughout our long friendship.

All his friends had access to a little of him. He'd send them drawings and collages. But probably only he could reassemble all the pieces of his auto-puzzle. He's going, knowing he was admired and much loved.

I used to enjoy meeting him, but in my film of him in his atelier, his creative lair [part of her 2011 TV series *Agnès de ci de là Varda*], he is heard but not seen.

He chose long ago to make himself known by his work and not by his face or through his personal life. He chose the drawing he made of his cat Guillaume-en-Egypte to represent him. He also chose – for a while at least – to appear in Second Life in the guise of a big, pale guy, an avatar who wandered around an island and chatted with an owl.

Now begins his third life. Long may it last!

**i** Interviews/translations by Chris Darke and Mar Diestro-Dópido. The Guzmán text is an edited extract of a tribute he has written, a complete version of which can be found online, along with longer versions of some of the other tributes, at [www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)

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*The leading light of the Berlin School of filmmakers, famed for the uneasy gaze they've cast over modern Germany, Christian Petzold now turns his attention to communist East Germany in the last decade of its existence, with the tense and probing 'Barbara'*

By Nick Hasted

# IN THE SHADOW OF THE WALL



**WAYS OF ESCAPE**  
Exiled to provincial East Germany, *Barbara* (Nina Hoss, opposite) plots escape while seeking solace with fellow doctor André (Ronald Zehrfeld, opposite top), in the new film by Christian Petzold, above

**Christian Petzold is the most prominent** of the Berlin School of German directors, the nation's first concerted wave of talent since the 1970s New German Cinema of Wenders, Herzog and Fassbinder. It's known as the Berlin School because several of its leading figures studied at that city's Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie – Petzold himself graduated in 1995, part of an initial band of fellow travellers including Angela Schanelec (*Marseille*, 2004). Cristoph Hochhäusler (*Milchwald*, 2003) and Ulrich Köhler (*Sleeping Sickness*, 2011) are among those affiliated filmmakers who studied elsewhere.

During his presidency of the Deutsche Filmakademie (the German equivalent to BAFTA), the veteran producer Günter Rohrbach, of *Das Boot* and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* fame, attacked the Berlin School for their inward-turning irrelevancy. But this year Petzold's Cold War drama *Barbara* – his sixth cinema feature following *The State I Am In* (2000), *Wolfsburg* (2003), *Gespenster* (2005), *Yella* (2007) and *Jerichow* (2008), plus four TV films – won the director the Silver Bear at the Berlinale; and like *The State I Am In* and *Yella* before it, the new film has found a substantial German audience.

The Berlin School stand in direct opposition to





 the Hollywood-influenced mainstream industry represented by films like Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Downfall* (2004), Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006) and Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008) – a dark brand of heritage cinema, often produced by the late Bernd Eichinger, which entertainingly explores a Germany of Nazis, terrorists and Stasi with which the rest of the world feels comfortable. Instead, the Berlin School aim to strip away the clichés, favouring long contemplative shots, precise framing and deliberate pace, with the intention – for Petzold at least – of seeking new, truer images for post-Wall Germany and its suppressed tensions.

"We don't make political, realistic movies," Petzold insists. But nevertheless, he tells me, what the filmmakers of the Berlin School seek to do "is more neorealist than *nouvelle vague*, because the neorealists recreate something, and the *nouvelle vague* deconstructs. We are [concerned with] the reconstruction of cinema."

Like many film movements, the school itself is fairly amorphous. "We're not aggressive enough or ambitious enough," Petzold insists. "There was a historical moment, maybe ten years ago, when we could have blown away the others – when we could have written a manifesto or something like that, or been more young and hard and modern. But we didn't. And I like that we didn't. For me the Berlin School still exists, but I don't know where. They have no room, they have no money, they have no organisation. But when I go as a professor to the academy, with the young people with the short movies they're making now, it still continues."

The Berlin School's most ambitious project to date is *Dreileben*, last year's triptych of television films with radically different vantage points on the escape of a sex offender, directed by Petzold, Hochhäusler and one of the movement's critics, Dominik Graf. The project arose out of email discussions between the three filmmakers that began in 2007 – discussions "about everything", as Hochhäusler told me last year: "what film can do, how cinema has changed and why, and what we should do about it."

The trilogy's setting in the Thuringian woods where Petzold took his East German holidays reveals his and Hochhäusler's roots in their country's primal forest myths and fairytales (the latter's *Milchwald* is a modern take on 'Hansel and Gretel'). As a child Petzold felt fearful but fascinated by the woods (which are also charged zones in *Yella* and *Barbara*). In Petzold's opening contribution to *Dreileben*, *Beats Being Dead* (*Etwas Besseres als den Tod*), the sex offender Molesch functions as a monster from the id, rising up in the film's last frames in a moment worthy of the director's teenage hero, Hitchcock. Watching it on DVD in the early hours, I yelled out loud at the moment when his knife jerks towards the film's young heroine. For all the Berlin School's strictures on clichéd representations and the self-consciousness with which Petzold constructs his Germany, the resultant emotion is powerfully real.

#### NO MAN'S LAND

In his films Petzold tends to place his protagonists in moving cars, in barren hotel corridors and bars where venture capitalists ply their trade (as in *Yella*), or in the no man's land between

*The DDR isn't just an idea. It's not just a picture – it's something to do with colours and wind and love and lips and sweat*

what was Berlin's East and West (in *Gespenster*). There are few establishing shots; as a viewer you are dropped on the ground, thrown off balance by a succession of unexpected camera angles, languid long-shots and sudden close-ups.

Thanks to his devotion to narrative, Petzold's films often become coolly gripping thrillers. His regular lead actress Nina Hoss won Berlin's Silver Bear for Best Actress for the title role in *Yella*, a woman from a small town in Germany's depressed East who seeks Western success, but may only be dreaming her escape from the lake into which her stalker ex-husband plunged her. Hoss is back in *Barbara* as a doctor seeking to flee provincial East Germany for the West in 1980. The film draws on Petzold's own memories of the DDR's lost world, from which his parents fled to the West German town of Hilden, where he was born in 1960.

"My parents never spoke about their youth," he remembers, "and my brothers and me, like refugees always are, were very ordinary – we didn't want to stand out. And then when I was nine or ten, we started to have vacations in the DDR, and I felt that my parents had come back home. They totally changed. They had friends, they sang songs, and so for me I was also divided in two parts. I didn't want to go to Majorca on vacation like the others. I liked that this was Germany, but like a miracle – a strange Germany, from the 20s and 30s. Heiner Müller, the writer, wrote that when he was leaving East Berlin by train to West Berlin, it was not only a voyage through space, but through time."

*Barbara*'s provincial East Germany is a place of green woodland and deep-red neon towns, sleepy but vividly alive – an island around which Hoss's Barbara circles, searching for ways of escape. The waves surrounding this island may only be revealed at the end of the film, but are felt through a characteristic Berlin School emphasis on diegetic sound: the whip of the wind, and the caws of seagulls.

"François Truffaut said about Jean Renoir's historical movies that it was a big mistake by Renoir to show the sky, because the sky and the wind are something from the present," Petzold says. "But I don't agree. I like to see that the DDR isn't just an idea. It's not just a picture – it's something to do with colours and wind and love and lips and sweat, everything. When you see nature in movies when it's not the studio, like in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, you have a fiction, but something around it is independently making its own life, like the wind and the rain, the night light. I want to have these two things in the movie – the documentary and the fiction."

In an effort to capture the true feel of life in East Germany at the time, Petzold created what he calls "mood rooms" in which the walls were covered with photographs from 1960s and 70s East Germany. "We looked at all the faces, clothes and gestures, to rebuild an atmosphere," he says. He also made a deliberate decision to avoid the muted hues of recent German Cold War films such as *The Lives of Others*. "In John Le Carré movies of the 60s like *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, their London is also grey, which I liked very much. But after '89, the movies in West Germany are [shot] so that we have the colours and they [the East Germans] have the grey, and we have the future and they are dead. But these were 40 years of a living society."



Petzold watched "many fantastic movies which were made in the DDR", citing in particular Jürgen Böttcher's *Jahrgang 45* (*Born in 45*), which was made in 1966 but banned in the DDR and not released until 1990. "It's like a *nouvelle vague* movie," Petzold explains. "They're young people, it's summer, they have very light skirts and shirts, and they're going around on motorbikes. I looked at all these pictures and photographs and literature from the 70s, and it was filled with a desire for a free life, and I wanted to show that."

### LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE

In the days leading up to her escape attempt, Barbara's work in a hospital, alongside committed, caring co-workers such as André (Ronald Zehrfeld), challenges her determination to leave. Having existed until then as if in a Cold War thriller, she finds herself lured into the sort of hospital romance André lends her from his bookshelf.

"I set *Barbara* in 1980 because by then everybody in the DDR knows that he's living in a dying country, and how can you start a love affair, or be pregnant, in a state which is dying?" Petzold explains. "Because love always has a present and a future. But when you're living in a country which is just history, nobody can stand that contradiction. These two doctors in *Barbara* are living in a dying society, but their work is full of skill and sensibility, and therefore they are human."

In the debt-ridden Europe of 2012, this theme has taken on a further, unexpected resonance, as Petzold discovered when the film premiered at Berlin in February. "There were so many journalists from Greece, and they asked me, 'How can you live and love in a country which is dying?'" he recalls. "I think there is a connection which I didn't think about when I made the movie: that that's also a feeling here in Germany and Spain and Greece and Italy—that something in the neo-liberal capitalist system is dying. And when something is dying, how can you tell stories about love affairs, or make a comedy? This is something to do with why so many people have seen this movie in Germany."

Petzold's previous international success *Yella* tried to make the vaporous reality of that late capitalist world solid, as a shadily attractive equity trader seduces the heroine into its subtle rituals of power, conducted through gestures and bluffs in hotel conference rooms. A similarly coded sort of communication exists in the East Germany of *Barbara*. "Ronald Zehrfeld, who grew up in East Germany, said, 'In the DDR, we were also speaking between the lines. We didn't speak so much—we looked, we had gestures,'" Petzold explains. "So Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld and me thought to make it like Howard Hawks's language in *To Have and Have Not* [1945, in which Bogart and Bacall's erotically charged romance takes place in defiance of Vichy secret police]: how you can play with the feeling that the state is always around; how you can hide yourself and also be clear in the same moment. So we worked in the rehearsals on this DDR language as the basis for a modern kind of seduction."

On Petzold's films, rehearsals take place on each morning of the usually sequential shooting – another way in which his practice differs from industry norms. "I don't want to realise a meaning which I have written down," he explains, "so our rehearsals aren't like in the



theatre. We have a week of going together to the movies, we look at comic-books, we have these mood rooms and we're talking about our memories, and then when we're shooting we meet at 8am, when the whole set is very free and there's nobody else there. The actors and me have three hours and we think about what is happening between the people, what's in the room. Then they go to make-up, and we think about the positions of the camera – these depend on the work the actors have done.

"My DP Hans Fromm is also part of the rehearsals," he continues. "He doesn't have an image in his mind coming in – he creates it then. He's open, he doesn't have a style. I prefer cameramen like Robby Müller, who want to learn something about the atmosphere and the rooms and the space, and Hans too is very, very open. He's absolutely perfect for me."

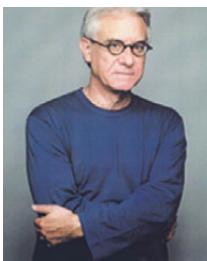
Petzold says this process is meant to find "free space" – the sort of spontaneous response that happened on *Barbara*'s final day of shooting, when Hoss threw Zehrfeld the look of challenging contact that ends the film. "In this moment, I as a director haven't any place," Petzold insists. "They've built up something new which belongs only to them. And this was something which hurt me a little bit, because it's out of my control. But also I feel really free at this moment, because something's going by itself, and for a moment I can't find words for what is happening there. I said to the actors later, 'It looks like you both created a new state. You are really free, and you make me free too.'"

**THE WOMAN IN QUESTION**  
Nina Hoss has taken the title roles in Petzold's 'Yella', top, and 'Barbara', opposite; above, Petzold's contribution to the TV trilogy 'Dreileben'

**i** **'Barbara'** is released in the UK on 28 September, and is reviewed on page 74

## DAVID THOMSON

Over almost four decades since the first edition of his legendary *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema* in 1975, David Thomson has established a reputation as arguably the most probing, perspicacious and personal film critic writing in the English language. And his magisterial new book published this month, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies and What They Did to Us*, is his most ambitious yet. In the first of a new series of in-depth *Sight & Sound* interviews with key figures in the world of film, he talks to the US cultural critic Greil Marcus, whose own books on the American imagination in American music are equally revered



**Greil Marcus:** I tried to roar through 'The Big Screen', but it was impossible. It's a ruminating book. The ideas, the references, the words, the construction of the sentences – they echo throughout. If you just read the book for information or read for plot, you're not watching the movie. You've got an argument about the nature of the screen and what it is in relationship to the human being, the human eye, the human memory: starting with Muybridge, going to videogames and past that. You raise issues regarding social life, cultural and individual memory, community, communication and democracy. What kind of culture does democracy produce? What kind of culture does democracy depend on? But that's not how the book reads to me: it's more like floating down a very long river. The boat doesn't change, the occupant doesn't change, but the weather changes, the terrain changes. The people you meet on the river, who you see on the shore, are continually changing. In other words, this is a self-referential book in the richest way.

**David Thomson:** I'm pleased that you have divined the essential thing about the book, which is that it should be appreciated as a movie. But it's a collage of movies, and one of the things about the screen is that it is this impersonal, essentially dead, blank space. It's there for us to use at our bidding. We have to turn on the machine for the screen to come to life. But the screen has carried every film that ever was.

I have become more and more interested in the way different movies are like the water in a river. They're constantly flowing into each other. Indeed, it's a form that you can't actually think of or describe as separate items; we're at a point in history where it's not really so significant who makes what movies – it's the constant flow.

You say it's like being carried down a river: a lot of time perhaps you feel that it's a sunny day and it's very pleasant, but you can drown in a river. A lot of the elements in a culture that I would hope to be able to see maintained and guarded are in danger of being drowned. It's a technology that we let loose upon ourselves and we've been through all manner of different stages of trying to define and limit it. So we said, for instance, "Oh, it's a business!" It's very clear

what you do: you make a film; it costs a certain amount of money; you offer it to the public and a year later, or a day later, you have a fortune!

Then there were people who said, "Well no, it's an artform, with artists." Then there's a notion that it's all about one of a series of very personal but also infinite and almost abstract things: memory, time, place, the face, violence, cruelty, romance, sex. You can see those as shoals of fish that are swimming in the river. It's very interesting just to look at film history in those terms. It's remarkable that it took so long for this to sink in – because it has been there since television. What seemed to all intents and purposes to be a visual medium became something that people felt they did not have to look at with concentration. You could turn it on and then do something else. You could talk to friends, take a phone call, eat a meal, have a domestic argument, fall asleep – a whole range of things. And when you woke up or when you came back out of whatever interlude it was, it was still going on. It was a different story, but all the stories were alike. They

had a 'storiness' to them that was repetitive and ritualistic, so that you weren't lost.

**GM:** What you're saying is that we watch movies that way anyway – or, let's say, movies watch us that way. We may think we're interested in the plot, but the movie knows we're not.

**DT:** I'm at pains in this book to stress that there was a period of real narrative sophistication and coherence in the movies, when movies did something that novels had done. There are still some movies made like that. What influenced this book is seeing the ways young people are using screens now and the whole idea that attention deficit has almost become the new model for consciousness. It had been there before – and very mysterious things were happening to people watching films from the beginning – but critical writing didn't really get onto that for a long time.

The way in which a film like *Un chien andalou* works is something that is fulfilled by the remote-control device with television. The surrealists talked about putting images together absolutely at random. It's very difficult for people to do that because they are exercising factors of choice all the time, but the remote control really introduces randomness. And people have made extraordinary films just by going through the channels for two or three seconds a channel. You used the metaphor of the river – you could call it a dream space, you could call it an underground – but it's there for all of us and it's very hard to tell whether it has been for good or for bad.

**GM:** One of the things that is so distinctive about this book is that it radiates pleasure – but at the same time almost any pleasure, particularly if it's strong enough, is immediately questioned. You're saying, "What are the implications of this? What does it mean to be moved by this, to become complicit in this thing happening on the screen, this terrible crime, this act of cruelty, this blankness where suddenly no one is feeling anything?" The energy of the book is both that of pleasure without morals, and a constant intellectual enquiry. You are arguing with yourself, and with cinema, and with any reader who brings his or her own experiences into the book. The book is seductive that way. Was it constructed that way intentionally?

**DT:** This was a book that I did not have anything like control of for a long time – that I felt very uneasy about. I was very daunted by the amount I had to cover. In the contract, the book was 120,000 words. Long before the end I realised that it was likely to be

### NOTES FROM THE DARK

**"Anyone with any sense of film knew not just that 'Psycho' changed 'cinema' but that now the subversive secret was out – truly this medium was prepared for an outrage in which sex and violence were no longer games but were in fact everything. 'Psycho' was so blatant that audiences had to laugh at it, to avoid the giddy swoon of evil and ordeal."**

Thomson in 'The Moment of Psycho: How Alfred Hitchcock Taught America to Love Murder' (2009)

**"In the summer of 2001, there was a story going around Hollywood that Michael Bay was seriously depressed. No one wishes to be callous, but this could be the start of something useful. For in sharing a common, sad state of mind, is it possible that Mr. Bay will eventually come to recognise the natural materials of a narrative art – the lives of ordinary people?"**

Thomson in 'The New Biographical Dictionary of Film' (fifth edition, 2010)





closer to twice that length. This was very confusing, and I was also in bad shape personally a lot of the time. So I started sort of in the middle. There were certain places – say with Renoir – where I knew what I wanted to say. So I started there and then began to think about how I was going to frame it.

The book was described in the proposal as a history. It had to have that ongoing momentum to it, but equally I had to bring together the disquiet I had been acquiring over movies, which was enormously reinforced by a similar source of uneasiness and regret over the state of the world. I had come to feel that what the screen does is say to you, "This is reality if you want to believe it, but it's a trick." You can tell yourself that you are dealing with reality and seeing reality, whereas in fact what the screen teaches you is that you don't have to bother: that the old connections of sympathy, anger, questioning, doubt, political involvement and action that we more or less believed in are a myth. You now live in a world where most intelligent young people are confident that it's going to end, and are assured of the futility of any of the kinds of action or response that would have come from sympathy or anger or protest. If you look at, say, [the] Fukushima [nuclear disaster] on the screen, the essential reaction is: "Oh, that's extraordinary. It's not me this time, but it will be." So what has come from this immersion in images and the imprint of reality is to teach us that we need have nothing to do with reality.

**GM:** To put it another way, you're saying that the movies and their attendant other media have proved a great machine for erasing empathy. But are you saying that was what was going on from the beginning?

**DT:** Yes. A lot of it has to do with the terrifying ways in which the world changes imaginatively between about 1800 and 1950 – the way in which population begins to take on a progression that is unstoppable and full of implications that we can hardly face up to. We try to deal with it with things like universal education and democracy, with the equalisation of the sexes and a whole lot of other things. But we got through a century of the most dire wars that have been fought, not just in terms of the number of people lost but in terms of the demonstration of casual wickedness. By 1945 you have produced a stage in technology whereby you could obliterate the world in a matter of a few seconds. For a few decades people live in terror of that. What I find so interesting is that that terror has now passed. The age in which people worried about nuclear testing, people did drills, the campaign for nuclear disarmament – it absolutely passed. It's now taken almost as, "That would be the best way to go, because it would be quick and it would be a great equaliser."

So it's a very broken-down culture, civilisation and community, and it seems to me that the stress upon fantasy and a privileged loneliness inherent in film has to do with this. But it's also a breakdown with mass media. Without mass media you're simply not going to have a chance of keeping the people

together – you know there's going to be chaos. And sooner or later – in [the US] at least – the fear of chaos, and possibly the immediate pain and damage from some sort of disaster, is going to inspire a fascist government. And that would be an incredible crushing of American hope – which, speaking as someone who was once not American, I see as one of the great ideals in the world. And it was an ideal that was embodied by American movies.

**GM:** There are so many passages in the book that I like: where you compare the Odessa Steps montage [in 'Battleship Potemkin'] to the shower sequence in 'Psycho'. Where you're talking about Louise Brooks and you say that she was someone who "didn't give a fuck" about the kind of careerism that motivated Mary Pickford. Just putting Louise Brooks and the phrase "didn't give a fuck" together tells you 90 per cent of what you need to know about Louise Brooks in four words. There are moments like that all through the book.

But what struck me very powerfully were two lines. You're talking about two films by Kurosawa, 'Ikiru' and 'Seven Samurai', and you say, "It's hard to believe the same man made both." OK, that's a perfectly ordinary and reasonable critical comment – followed by, "But it's hard to believe anyone made either." Now that's a thought of a completely different order – and it's a much better sentence. It has a cadence that captures that experience in the face of art – whether it's music, painting, a movie, a novel – where you simply don't believe that it could be the product of will or intent or even desire. It seems too good, too great, too much to just be made. That sense of awe and that sense of surrender – it's extraordinarily valuable, and it's rare. Do you find other critics speaking that language of awe?

**DT:** I don't read the great range of stuff written on film – but no, I don't find it. There are people writing today that I value. They are very intelligent, very sensible, but for me one of the huge reasons to write about film was to convey what it felt like – the visceral, direct emotional experience of that moment. I don't think too many people take that on now. I don't know whether it's the quality of the writers or it's an expectation in the readers or editors.

It was something Pauline [Kael] did. She had



Just putting Louise Brooks and "didn't give a fuck" together tells you 90 per cent of what you need to know about her

the urge to do it as a basic reason for writing about film: I've got to make you go see it and I don't know a better way of doing that than saying, "This is what it felt like." Manny Farber had a feeling for it – but there's something very odd about him if you read him now. There was something in him that was very daring, but he craved a kind of respectability. The thing I value in Pauline Kael is a refusal to be embarrassed. For instance, what she said when *Last Tango in Paris* opened: that it had "the same kind of hypnotic excitement" as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* when it opened – "the same primitive force, and the same thrusting, jabbing eroticism. The movie breakthrough has finally come." Time has not been kind to it – I don't know if she would have said the same thing now. But the passion in her writing, and the quality in the prose, forgives anything. It's a great piece. Perhaps it's mistaken – doesn't matter.

I just taught a term at Stanford. The kids at Stanford are smart kids, well educated. They can write a critical paper, but I guess they don't know themselves well enough to express their own emotion of looking at the film. They're too cool. More than reading fiction, film for me was the key to feeling things, and therefore it seemed that one wanted to describe what happened on the screen as accurately but also as emotionally as possible. It was also, at the start, an alternative to making film. I wanted to make films. I went to film school. I've made some films. I know that when I started to write about films in a really serious way, I was using a disappointed energy that had not been able to make films. So that a book like [Thomson's 1985 novel] *Suspects* [in which he wrote fictional continuations of the lives of *film noir* characters], say, is literally a remaking of these films: it's imagining a life not just beyond the frame, but beyond the time confines of the film.

**GM:** In 'The Big Screen' you have David O. Selznick saying late in his life, "A few good movies. Thirty years – and one good movie a year is the record. Ten out of ten thousand." It's basically Selznick saying, "This was the greatest opportunity ever handed to human beings to tell the story, and all we did was build a 'junk industry'."

**DT:** Which is silly, of course.

**GM:** But you return to this portent at the end of the book. By then you've established countless films that deserve to live forever. And you say, "Does it matter?" The baton is passed from Selznick to you in that sense.

**DT:** The big experiences for me have been leaving Britain and going to America, going into academia and leaving academia. In both cases they've been somewhat risky decisions to try to take on a large enterprise. *Suspects* and *Silver Light* [his follow-up 1990 novel, using characters from westerns] were very important for me in learning about America and learning to write American rather than English. I wrote English, and in America it sounded rather prim and stuffy; wanting to write American has been a big issue in my working life. I often say to people that *Silver Light* is my favourite book because it was about discovering a certain landscape that I fell in love with.

**GM:** There's a moment in 'The Big Screen' that opens into a book to come, where you're talking about Fritz Lang: "Lang's big lie was in denying his own appetite for murderousness and film's impassive but mounting ease with it." So I'd like to talk a little bit about your murder book.

**DT:** I haven't written a word of it yet, but it's the book at the moment that I'm most excited about. Its working title is *Red Rum: Murder in Our Minds*. It's an attempt to track the ways in which murder became increasingly acceptable. It's about movies, books, painting to a degree too. An incident in my life that occurred years ago set me thinking. Someone said to me, "Would you be able to murder someone?" I said, "Do you mean just kill someone? If someone came in and attacked me, could I just kill them?" And he said, "No, no, no. I mean, could you in cold blood decide to murder someone and do it – and survive, not in the sense that you wouldn't be caught but that you could live with it?"

I didn't know the answer. This person said, "I have a great idea for a movie," one that has since come to pass in various forms – this was a long time ago. He said, "It's about a man who's told that he has a year to live, and he decides, "This is a terrible world. If I'm going to die, I'm going to do some good. I'm going to pick, from the thousands you could pick, five people who deserve to die and I'm going to murder them."

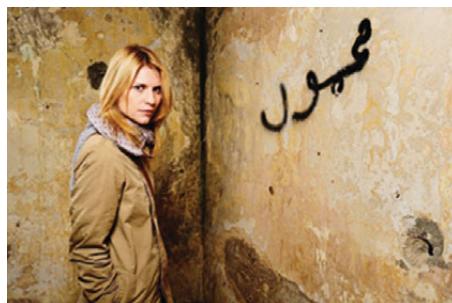
It set me thinking. I began to notice that we were in a very strange way falling in love with murderers. Clearly we've lived through an age where murder has been practised in the most appalling ways. Why is it that we've become more attracted to murder? Why is it that nowadays we treasure the actors that play villains and identify with them more than we do with heroes?

**GM:** You mean people who are strictly presented as villains? Not Tony Soprano, who is our hero who does bad things?

**DT:** I mean it's a bit of both. Tony Soprano is a very interesting case. He's actually not a very interesting character, until you realise that David Chase is going to spend five years just looking at him. You're going to accumulate so much detail about him that he will become, not sympathetic – although he has things about his life that might prompt sympathy – but he's going to become perhaps the most fully drawn person in modern fiction. And he's a brute, he's a killer. Chase has actually been kind to him, in that he's dressed him up in a kind of psychological agonising that I'm not sure that guy would have in real life. But that's legitimate. And it was a very compelling story.

Hannibal Lecter is great case in point. *The Silence of the Lambs* was a sensational film. It won Hopkins the Oscar when he was on screen for – I don't know – 20 minutes. And Lecter is hideous in the sense of what he does – and the film makes clear what he does. But there is a bond between him and Clarice, so that by the time the next film [*Hannibal*] comes along, it's a love story.

**GM:** You see the same thing in 'Homeland', where Claire Danes is having her affair with a marine who she is convinced is a terrorist in disguise. It's not that her sexual attraction



*Television is so much better than the movies now. 'Homeland' was a major work, full of vulnerable, interesting people*

**to him obviates her suspicion – it intensifies it, which makes it all that much worse.**

**DT:** You've touched upon something very important to this book and to what I do, what you do: television is so much better than the movies now. I mean, *Homeland* was a major work.

**GM:** It was always on knife-point, and in a different way than '24': With '24', for the first two or three seasons that clock is ticking away, and when it gets to that seven or eight minutes left in the episode I can't wait for it to be over – the tension is so extreme it's all I can take.

**DT:** But you can't wait for the next one!

**GM:** It's like someone putting a needle in your arm and taking it out an hour later. With 'Homeland' the tension is not of that sort – it's in wondering whether this woman that you make an instant connection to is going to shatter before your eyes or hold herself together with scotch tape.

**DT:** And one of the greatest mad scenes ever done. You care much more about the people in *Homeland*. There's something about Kiefer Sutherland [in *24*] that resists our caring. But *Homeland* was full of vulnerable, interesting people.

**GM:** I never cared about Kiefer Sutherland. I was just scared to death.

**DT:** *24* was a wonderful suspense machine. You used that image just now about putting the needle in yourself, and the sort of self-abusive, self-destructive element in our culture is a part of all these things. Drug-taking is an equivalent, or an extension, of the fantasising in movies. It's part of the encouragement to seek a very private, calm world. That notion of, "If the world is going to end, we'll all need a drug." I am not a drug-taker, but I am a medication-taker – and it changed my life. More and more our loneliness is being assuaged by addictions of one kind or another, and it will be a big part of the end of the world.

There are still moments of awe at the movies, and it's very important to stress that. I knew this book was headed towards a dark ending – I'm not sure I can write a book that isn't headed towards a dark ending. But I wanted there to be as much light as possible along the way. The reason I ended the book the way I did – that really was a joyous experience at Dartmouth [College] when I projected *The Clock*. It really returned the people who saw it to a kind of innocence and sheer delight at movement.

**GM:** You divided Vincente Minnelli's 1945 film 'The Clock' into two reels and projected the first reel forwards, the second reel in reverse, and they ran side by side.

**DT:** I don't know that I've ever seen an audience so excited. People were literally bouncing up and down in their seats – it made us all children again. This was a class of bright kids at Dartmouth. Everyone could see some of the implications and the consequences in it – could see what it was teaching us about narratives and shots. That incident was 1980, I think, and in the 30-plus years since, we've learned to realise that we're not just looking at a version of the world – we're looking at screens that tell us, "Don't worry about the world."

**i** **David Thomson's 'The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies and What They Did to Us' is published in the UK by Allen Lane on 4 October, and is reviewed on page 122**



*True love: Thomson's book ends with an account of an unorthodox screening of Minnelli's 'The Clock'*

### ARTISTS' FILM & VIDEO

## 100 DAYS OF SUMMER

Germany's Documenta art festival offers a mixture of the grandiose, the megalomaniacal and works on a human scale

By Simon Merle

Once every five years, sleepy Kassel in Germany becomes the international fine-art jet set's place to be, as the extended exhibition known as Documenta takes over the town. Founded in 1955 by Arnold Bode, Documenta was originally intended as an exhibition that would bring West Germany up to speed with the most important tendencies and developments in the international arts since 1933, when the Nazi Reich cut itself off from civilisation. At first it was held every four years; since 1972, it's been put on twice a decade.

Cinema was always a part of Documenta, but only in the last two decades has it become a must-attend event for cinephiles – in some venues it feels as if one has stumbled into a film festival held in an unusual space. The presence of names such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Tacita Dean, William

Kentridge, Matias Faldbakken and Francis Alÿs suggests a time when film and fine art have found a merry modus vivendi as never before (probably because film itself is slowly turning ever more into an art for museums...).

As is traditional, Documenta runs for 100 days – from 9 June to 16 September, in this 13th edition. For the average Kasseler, three months might be quite enough to enjoy the event properly: with the appropriate ticket, she or he could spend maybe an hour there every day, and in the end be able to see (or at least get a good-enough glimpse of) everything on show. But that's only the exhibition proper, because there are, of course, myriad sidebars: discussions, film series, readings, meetings with artists and curators – whatever adds yet another discursive layer. If the local wants to partake of that as well, doing Documenta turns into a full-time occupation.

So consider what all this means for the visitor from afar – the event's main patron... More so than ever, then, Documenta (13) is something to sample – a behemoth of exquisite objects and noble intentions. A lot of pre-planning is required in order to get at least some grip on things. At Documenta (13) so

many works were presented, by 200 different artists, that their full appreciation would demand some two Documentas' worth of 24/7-watching – and that's an estimate based solely on works with a set running time.

But what about a work such as Albert Serra's *The Three Little Pigs*, whose projected final length is – depending on the source – 200 or 2,000 hours? Every day, Serra shoots something either in his makeshift studio or around town, and then immediately edits the material; every evening there's a screening of new scenes. The making seems more important here than the result – even if that's supposed to get screened as well in the end, as a kind of coda to the whole event. You could call *The Three Little Pigs* Documenta (13)'s daily soap, with Goethe, Hitler and Fassbinder – its principal characters – being treated the way Don Quixote or the Three Magi were in Serra's earlier happenings-camouflaged-as-features.

Megalomania is a word often heard in connection with Documenta, and this edition's grandiosity did become tiresome. There's something monstrous about the event's humongous dimensions and *über*-reaching ambition. It felt as if the only response was to



Someone to watch over me: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 'The Importance of Telepathy'

## NEWS AND EVENTS

● **Liverpool Biennial** seems to get bigger and better every year, reflecting a lively arts scene in the city. This edition marks the Olympic year with the theme of Hospitality uniting the works of 242 artists on display over 27 different locations in the city, from museums and galleries to a pub, a bakery and a former sorting office, as well as the city's docks and its iconic Cunard Building. The Biennial runs from 15 September to 25 November, and features new work by artists and filmmakers such as Doug Aitken, Akram Zaatari, David Panos and Anja Kirschner. [www.biennial.com](http://www.biennial.com)

● **Rewind** is a crucial research project based at the University of Dundee exhuming the lost history of the invention of video art in the UK, for which important early single-channel and installation works have been remastered and archived. To coincide with a new book 'Rewind: British Artists' Video in the 1970s and 1980s', edited by Sean Cubitt and Stephen Partridge, screenings of key works of UK video art will take place at the Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern on 25 September. [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

● **John Akomfrah's** most recent film was 'The Nine Muses', a multilayered, poetic reflection on immigration to Britain drawing on spellbinding archive footage. The former Black Audio Film Collective member's latest work is 'Hauntologies', an exhibition of three new video, sound and installation commissions meditating on disappearance, memory and death, that runs at Carroll/Fletcher gallery, London W1, from 5 October to 8 November.

● **James Benning** has long been one of the giants of the experimental American scene, but it's been difficult to see his work beyond the festival circuit. Thanks to an exciting initiative by the Austrian Film Museum, Benning's works are now appearing on DVD. Earlier this year a two-disc set of 'American Dreams' and 'Landscape Suicide' was issued, followed now by another two films: 'casting a glance', Benning's paean to Robert Smithson's legendary 'earthwork' sculpture the 'Spiral Jetty', and 'RR', Benning's homage to the American railroad.

● **Ian Breakwell** was an artist who roved across a number of mediums – from painting to performance – but the moving image was always at the heart of his idiosyncratic practice, be it his television broadcasts or his diary films. On show at the De La Warr Pavilion from 6 October to 13 January is the largest retrospective of Breakwell's career to date, including many rare and little-seen works. [www.dlwp.com](http://www.dlwp.com)



Vann Nath's 'Interrogation at the Kandal Pagoda'

look for art on a slightly more human scale – and resist the urge to focus on audiovisual art, of which Documenta (13) was chock full. Moving images seemed to be everywhere – a film here, a multiscreen installation there.

Once again Weerasethakul led the way. He, of all people, didn't deliver yet another masterpiece of mellow movie modernism, but provided visitors with a very particular kind of cinema experience, *The Importance of Telepathy*: a grove surrounded at uneven intervals with hammocks – a space of repose for the drowsy and spiritually oversaturated, guarded by a kind 14-foot phantom. If you listened, you could hear bells chiming in the wind. Weerasethakul calls his work "a cinema for the trees and their biotic friends" – which turns the resting visitors into actors in a spectacle put on to entertain nature. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

It was easy to miss Vann Nath's oil painting *Interrogation at the Kandal Pagoda*, a 2006 depiction of Khmer Rouge torture at its most ordinary: a man with his arms tied behind his back in a potentially joint-cracking manner is studiously ignored by two officials, who find their papers and a sickly candle more important than their exhausted victim. There's nothing here but bright-hued suffering and indifference. Hope can only be found in the fact that this picture was made long after Pol Pot had gone.

Those who saw Rithy Panh's documentary *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) will remember Vann: he was one of the very few to survive Cambodia's most notorious extermination camp. S-21 had no gas chambers, but a lot of guards willing to break heads or drown people by the dozen. Vann got away because he was an artist: the Angkar (the Khmer Rouge's central committee) made him paint for them.

After the Khmer Rouge's fall, Vann put his art into the service of remembrance: his sole subject for a long time was life and death in S-21 and similar places of oppression and

### *Cinema was always a part of Documenta, but only in the last two decades has it become a must-attend event for cinephiles*

mass murder. Part of that project, for him, was Rithy's film, in whose making he was deeply involved – in a lot of ways, it's his film as much as the director's. Looking at *Interrogation at the Kandal Pagoda* in all its Impressionism-rooted yet eerily medieval beauty is like glimpsing a frame of the film evoked by Rithy's witnesses – their attempts at reconstructing hell in our midst. Vann died last year; it was only quite late in life that he started to paint other subjects as well: his last works show rural landscapes, farm work – scenes from his childhood, life before terror.

The sketches in watercolours, ink and pen made by Viet Cong artists such as Vu Giang Huong, Huynh Phuong Dong, Nguyen Thanh Chau, Quach Phong and Kim Tien – presented by Lê Quang Dinh (or Dinh Q. Lê, as he westernised his name) in his installations *Light and Belief: Voices and Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War* – are not acts of remembrance but part of front-line routine: that's where they were made, and where people looked at them. Lê used some of these works in a documentary tribute to the soldier-painters, in which he animated their images, occasionally transforming his interviewees into drawings in motion.

There's something unexpectedly peaceful about *Light and Belief*, and the sketches in particular. Despite its martial subject, Truong Hieu's *Trần Ap Bac* (1968), for example, exudes a sense of calm resolve and patience. No grandstanding here, just the conviction that they all should – and indeed will – see a time after war in a liberated land. Nothing from Hollywood ever looked like this – it's a miracle these pictures survived.

# OWEN LAND

After years living in obscurity, the acclaimed avant-garde filmmaker found a last surge of creativity in his final years

By Mark Webber

Owen Land (formerly known as George Landow) was one of a number of filmmakers who emerged in the mid-1960s in a loose group centred around Jonas Mekas in New York. This younger generation constituted the second wave of American avant garde that followed in the wake of post-war pioneers such as Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren and Gregory Markopoulos. Land was one of the first to make films in which not only the form but also the content was dictated by the medium. His *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.* (1965-66) does exactly what it says on the can: it foregrounds the physical material of the filmstrip and those imperfections that laboratories and projectionists usually work so hard to conceal. The film became one of the touchstones of experimental cinema and a prime example of 'structural film' – a term that Land (like many others) rejected. Over the next decade, he mocked this and other theoretical discourses, using wit and visual invention to make films that are among the most popular and widely accessible works of the avant garde.

All the films made during this main period of activity were credited to George Landow, but towards the end of the 1970s he began to use the name Owen Land. The reason for this name change is one of many biographical details that remain unexplained following his death last year – Land(ow) has always been something of an enigma, a mysterious character who had a habit of disappearing, suddenly leaving jobs, relocating to different cities or severing contact with friends and colleagues.

In the late 1990s, two decades after his last-completed work – *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?* (1977-79), a film just as magnificent as its title is long – he materialised in Berkeley, California, and began working on an ambitious 16mm feature. *Undesirables* was inspired by a conversation Land once had with Stan Brakhage, in which they speculated which actors would portray avant-garde filmmakers in the Hollywood version of their lives. (Orson Welles would of course be Brakhage.) About 40 minutes of footage was shot, but all that survives is a rough, 11-minute edit done for fundraising purposes. It's a hilarious inside joke: thinly veiled caricatures of recognisable filmmakers appear in scenes that are stylistic parodies of classic avant-garde films such as *Pull My Daisy* and *Critical Mass*.

Though his earlier films were regularly being shown, Land himself slipped from public view in the 1980s. Having left his teaching position in Chicago, he spent a year-long residency in Japan, made two rarely seen videos and returned to college to study painting. My first contact with him in 1997 coincided with the



**A modern affair: 'Dialogues' or 'A Waist Is a Terrible Thing to Mind'**

preparatory work on *Undesirables*. Two years later, I invited him to introduce a solo screening as part of the Whitney Museum's 'American Century' exhibition. He agreed to travel to New York and make a rare public appearance, but six weeks before the event, letters were returned undelivered, his telephone was disconnected and Land was nowhere to be found.

When a VHS tape of excerpts from *Undesirables* surfaced three years later, it was shown in the 40th New York Film Festival. This was an unauthorised screening, organised in the hope that if Land were still alive, he might attend or at least make contact; when the festival passed without incident, there was speculation about his untimely demise.

Then in 2003, I chanced upon a phone number I suspected might be his mother's. I dialled the number and explained I was a calling from London in the hope of finding a filmmaker who I thought was her son. Asking about Owen Land proved fruitless, but when I mentioned George Landow, I was surprised to hear her call him over. What felt like minutes passed, but eventually a very frail-sounding man picked up the phone. Owen was surprised, if not shocked, that I'd found him. Though he never told me directly, he had suffered a stroke which left him so debilitated he'd gone to live with his elderly mother at a retirement community in Florida.

Land was resident in this facility for assisted living while we collaborated on the 'Two Films by Owen Land' and touring retrospective 'Reverence'. These projects revived interest in his work within the film and art worlds, and

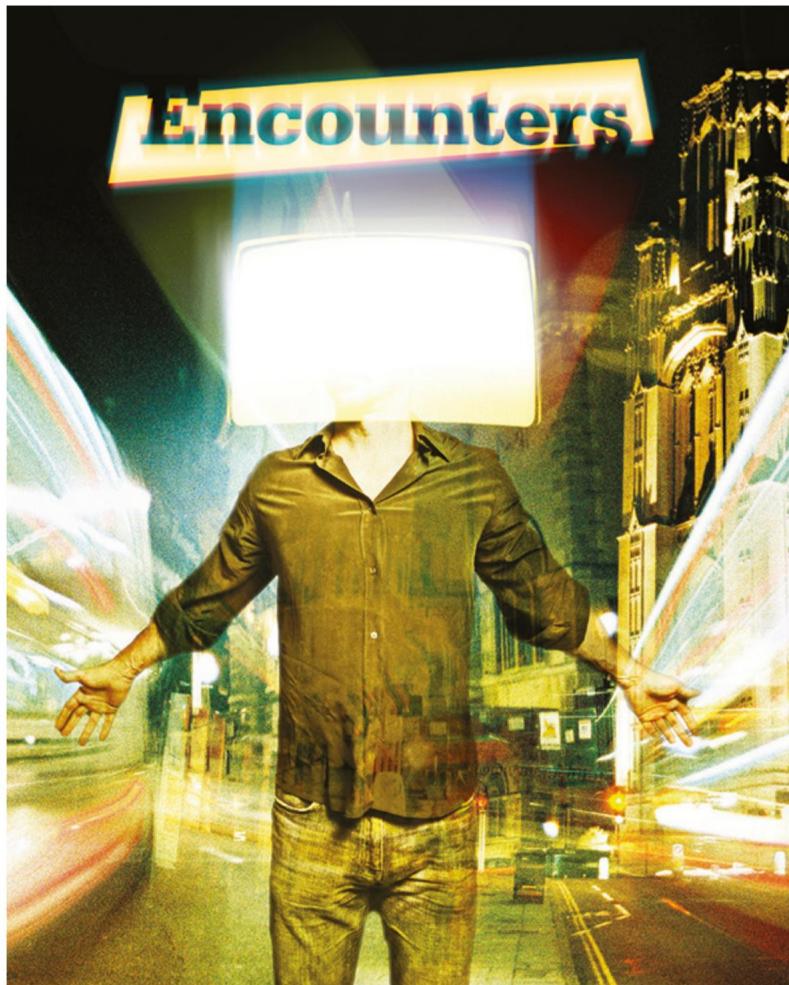
*Land has always been something of an enigma, a mysterious character who had a habit of disappearing*

revitalised his creativity. In 2006, planning to make a new feature, he moved to Los Angeles, where members of the local film community rallied in support. Eventually he settled in the tiny apartment where we finally met in person a couple of years later, but our contact became more sporadic – other people were helping now, not least the Belgian gallery Office Baroque, which had begun to represent him. Production on his new film was intermittent and often troubled (see *In the Land of Owen* on Vimeo, a funny featurette made by disgruntled crew members), but it was completed with funding secured through Kunsthalle Bern, where it was to premiere in spring 2009.

Land described *Dialogues* or *A Waist Is a Terrible Thing to Mind* as his take on the legend of Parsifal, in which the protagonist is a 'pure fool' who thinks he can find the Holy Grail 'between a maid's legs'. The reality of viewing the film isn't quite so poetic – it's a relentless sequence of some 50 discrete episodes shot in the harsh clarity of digital video. Despite brief glimpses of idiosyncratic absurdity and some genuinely inspired visual ideas (like the *Artforum* cover brought to life), it's unfortunately tainted by crass, sexist humour. Many scenes fall flat at dead-end jokes, or seem to be constructed only for the purpose of having yet another young woman take her top off.

Having said all that, there's much about *Dialogues* that I enjoy, and Owen's determination to make this last film against all odds is certainly admirable. He died destitute in his LA apartment in June 2011; the circumstances are still unknown. *Dialogues* is the epic swansong that concludes a remarkable body of work. It's a long two hours, but you can be certain that you'll never see anything else quite like it.

**i Owen Land's final film 'Dialogues' or 'A Waist Is a Terrible Thing to Mind' is showing at London's ICA on 19 September**



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# SCRATCHED RECORDS

Cinema history is littered with examples of rejected film scores, decisions that have immeasurably altered the viewer experience

By Frances Morgan

For every alternate take of a classic album, there's probably a film score that likewise never made it to the final cut. Like bootlegs and demo sessions that develop an aura more precious – and more fervently maintained – than the canonical 'proper' versions, a few of these rejects have taken on a life of their own. Coil's unused music for *Hellraiser* (1987) has long slipped its moorings from the world of the Cenobites, although fans of both the band and the film's writer-director Clive Barker endeavour to keep them together, reportedly asking Barker to autograph copies of the Coil CD at book signings. Most famously, there's the story of Bernard Herrmann's lost music for Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*, discarded when the director decided that a film made in 1966 needed something more upbeat. While the original recordings of *Torn Curtain* have been lost, the score wasn't, and excerpts from newer renditions of it are included on Herrmann best-ofs as if they had accompanied the film.

In both cases, fans have retrospectively decided what the proper version should be, with John Addison's official music for *Torn Curtain* regarded by some as a perfectly serviceable but rather regrettable decision on Hitchcock's part, and *Hellraiser*'s atmospheric but more conventional orchestral horror soundtrack (by Christopher Young) as another aspect of the story's Americanisation. Most of the time, though, we have no idea about the wrangles and compromises that go on behind what eventually emerges as a film's OST, or what was left by the wayside.

Yet as with other kinds of musical outtakes, these rejected compositions have their own collectors and cataloguers. There are whole taxonomies of the film music that might have been: blogs, discographies like the extensive one listed on the Film Score Daily website and, recently, film-music historian Gergely Hubai's book *Torn Music*, which tells the stories of 300 rejected film scores, by and large from mainstream US cinema. Like all completist worlds, the rejected-film-score community is at turns hugely fascinating and formidably dense with detail, quickly blurring into lists of names and dates and data. There's not the unifying factor of a single artist or label or even genre that you find in record-collector communities – rejected score lists seem to take in everything from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (for which Alex North's original score was discarded in favour of Kubrick's pioneering use of existing classical music) to *March of the Penguins* (not so much a reject as a case of two scores, one for the US version and one for the European – in case you were wondering).

Hubai's book provides a slightly clearer path through this sub-subgenre. Amid definitive cinematic top tens, there's something refreshing



Lost in music: Hitchcock discarded Herrmann's score for 'Torn Curtain' for something more upbeat

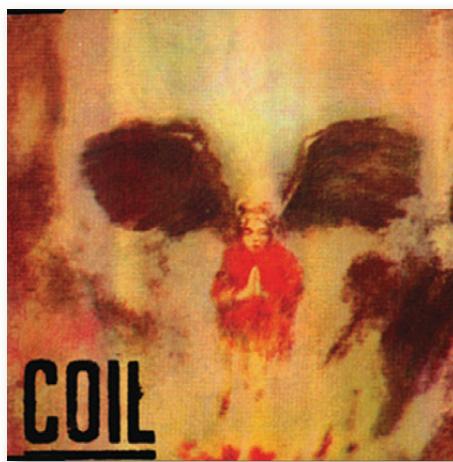
about a list whose organisational logic is based very simply on whether a film came out with its intended music or not, and whether there's a good story behind it. Chronologically arranged, *Torn Music* starts at the dawn of sound films with a Max Steiner score from 1932 and ends in the late 2000s with a rescored videogame. Musicological details are fairly scant in these brief entries; instead, the focus is on the budgetary pressures, pragmatism, studio politics, legal issues and good old-fashioned cynicism that affect the soundtracking of a commercial film just as much as they do any other part of the process. The importance of a film's music, it emerges, is matched by its expendability: it's one of the easiest things to change at the last minute, yet doing so can alter an audience's experience immeasurably.

Louis and Bebe Barron, who created the iconic all-electronic score for *Forbidden Planet* (1956), weren't the first choice for the film, whose music had already been commissioned from MGM composer David Rose; a prescient snap decision from the producer, who'd attended one of the Barrons' concerts, got them the job. Their outsider status as electronic composers – and the popular reputation of electronic music at the time – is indicated by the fact that, in *Forbidden Planet*'s credits, they're listed only as providing 'Electronic Tonalities', as if to say that their sonic explorations couldn't possibly be 'music'. The same year, Bergman's *Summer with Monika* had been recut for the US market

*The importance of a film's music is matched by its expendability: it's one of the easiest things to change at the last minute*

by exploitation director Kroger Babb, who completed the job with a new score by exotica maestro Les Baxter. His sultry but cloying string arrangements convey as much about the sexual politics of the era as Babb's retitling of the film as *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl*.

Not all lost film music is gone for good. The



Coil's original unused soundtrack for 'Hellraiser'

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Varèse Sarabande label has released a number of recordings of rejected film scores, tending towards the large-scale and orchestral. One composer who has drawn particular attention to the non-use of her work is Wendy Carlos, who in 2005 released two volumes of rejected film music on CD as *Rediscovering Lost Scores* (both now extremely hard to come by).

The sheer amount of unused film music in Carlos's vaults is a consequence of her interest in what she terms 'archeomusicology' (as the albums are subtitled) – and, in part, of working with Kubrick, who in the 1970s seemed to have a habit of replacing the music commissioned for his films, albeit with amazing results. Carlos's cues for *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) mostly made the final film, but much of her score for *The Shining* (1980) was shelved in favour of Kubrick's own, paradigm-shifting experiments with modernist classical compositions by Bartók and Penderecki – although the main title retains her unearthly electronic-orchestral touch.

The selections of *Shining* offcuts included on volume one of *Rediscovering Lost Scores* add an extra shiver to the well-known soundscape of the film. Played by a mixture of live musicians and electronic instruments such as a Moog synthesiser and Carlos's own invention the Circon, they have a weird, glacial charm, recognisable yet inhuman. One track, 'Clockworks (Bloody Elevators)' was used in *The Shining*'s trailer, which is still one of the most visually and aurally haunting adverts ever made for a film. In this instance, while the track isn't used in the film, it's a pretty accurate harbinger of what's to come.

More recently, the first TV teasers for Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* sounded incredible, creating in less than a minute a sense of vast space and relentless terror. The visual glimpses of spaceship and alien planet were offset by extracts from Marc Streitenfeld's score, pared down to huge blasts and thuds of noise, industrial-sounding shrieks and desperate radio crackle. But in the ensuing film, this 'cosmic horror' soundscape was rarely to be heard; buried in an overbearing Wagnerian battery of brass, strings, choirs and sentiment, it hadn't been rejected, as such – just thoroughly swamped.



The replacement score for 'Forbidden Planet'

The short-lived Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion provided a niche for the old and valued and new and exotic

By Henry K. Miller

They didn't call them movies for nothing. Apart from its split-second passage through camera and projector, a film's circulation around the country's picture theatres could be measured in hours. By the late 1910s most British cinemas, running to Hollywood's clock, changed programme twice a week. Sensitive observers noticed how easy it was to miss a film, and how hard to see one the system hadn't made time for.

The need for a British home for the old and valued and the new and exotic was obvious, and felt

yet more deeply after art cinemas opened in Paris and New York. Although there had been comparable attempts in London, none had prospered. In October 1927 the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion, on the site of the present Curzon Soho, showed its first "unusual film". Six months later, in April 1928, with the British debut of G.W. Pabst's 'The Loves of Jeanne Ney' (1927), the experiment began to take.

The venue itself had been constructed in 1912 by Israel Davis, who built up a chain of well-appointed Electric Pavilions around London, run by his wife Minnie, Britain's first female cinema manager, and later by their four sons. By the mid-1920s the Shaftesbury Avenue branch was too small to compete with the cavernous 'super-cinemas' then taking over the West End, and in early 1927 it was absorbed with its three sister pavilions into the new Gaumont-British combine, though the Davis sons retained oversight.

Credit for its change in policy was claimed both by Stuart Davis and by the venue's manager Leslie Ogilvie, a veteran showman who was not prepared to let questions of taste impede his pursuit of bums on seats. The "only criticism" to be levelled at Jeanne Ney, wrote Iris Barry in the Daily Mail, "is in the way it is being advertised with the inappropriate and unpleasant additional title of 'Lusts of the Flesh'."

The Avenue Pavilion, as it was usually called, little resembled an avant-garde salon. The highbrow magazine Close Up was disappointed to find that "there is no air that you are assisting at something rather extraordinary", and the Film Society, which had been arranging monthly programmes of continental films for its small haute bourgeois-bohemian membership since 1925, regarded the new venture's commercialism with suspicion. Gaumont, for its part, was pleased enough by the venue's balance sheet by the end of 1928 to extend the policy to two further cinemas,

the Century in Liverpool and the Savoy in Leeds. "The success of the enterprise," said Davis in retrospect, "was proved by the receipts which had been doubled."

Initially he and Ogilvie concentrated on German films, customarily if not wholly accurately called 'Expressionist', whose heyday in Britain had just passed, though even films released within the last five years were already hard to find. The (London) Evening News reported that "Dr. Mabuse" is missing and the negative of 'Dr. Caligari', it transpires, was burnt in a transport accident." Prints of

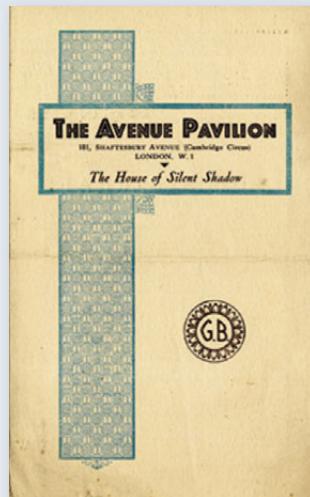
both were subsequently found. On the Pavilion's first anniversary, Ogilvie balloted 5,000 regulars to discover their favourites from the year, and re-activated six, including Arthur Robison's 'Warning Shadows' (1923) and E.A. Dupont's 'Vaudeville' (1925).

Within the same 12 months the venue had double-billed Murnau's 'Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans' (1927) with Lubitsch's 'Forbidden Paradise' (1924), Sternberg's 'Underworld' (1927) with Murnau's 'The Last Laugh' (1924), and Walter Ruttmann's 'Berlin' (1927) with Chaplin's 'A Woman of Paris' (1923). Most of the choices reflected critical opinion, but they also helped shape it. As well as critics like Barry, who founded the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, the Pavilion's audience included David Lean, Malcolm Lowry and the men who went on to form the documentary film movement. Paul Rotha's influential 'The Film Till Now', published in four editions between 1930 and 1967, was substantially the fruit of time spent at the Pavilion.

After Ogilvie's departure in June 1929, Davis travelled to Paris to replenish the vaults, leading to a season of French cinema – in itself a novelty – that included Jean Epstein's 'Finis Terrae' (1929), René Clair's 'An Italian Straw Hat' (1927) and Jean Renoir's 'The Little Match Girl' (1928), whose opening in December 1929 was attended by Renoir and leading lady Catherine Hessling. Another from the same haul, 'The Rose of Pu-Chui' (1927), was reputedly the first Chinese film shown in Europe.

By then the Pavilion was advertised as "The House of Silent Shadow", and its days were numbered. In the course of its brief life, the talkie revolution had broken out, and in March 1930 caught up with it. Davis's contract expired and Gaumont had other plans; having been wired for sound, the Pavilion reopened as a newsreel theatre.

Fortunately, others rose to take its place.



A Pavilion programme from 1929



# FREE AND FLEXIBLE

Documentary and fiction blurred to such an extent that the terms became virtually meaningless at this year's Locarno Film Festival

By Kieron Corless

One film in particular set the tone for much of the programming at this year's Locarno festival; our cover feature *Holy Motors*, Leos Carax's surreal, episodic cine-dream, which formed the centrepiece of a retrospective linked to a career award for its director. *Holy Motors'* formal panache, its brazen cinephilia, its looking back to move forward, seemed a fitting encapsulation of the way of things at Locarno under Olivier Père, in his third and final year as artistic director before departing to head up ARTE. As well as the big anchoring classical retrospective – first year Lubitsch, last year Minnelli, this year Preminger (with a fine accompanying book), each of the competitive strands offered a particular slant on the more inventive currents in contemporary cinema. Like Carax there were bold innovators aplenty, pioneering grapplers with form, with new ways to tell a story (or not) and engage with the medium and the world, often on tiny budgets. A few of them proved to be disappointments, but you couldn't fault the ambition and intention; overall, successes outweighed the failures.

Père's programming partner has been Mark Peranson, editor of the always absorbing and instructive Canadian film magazine *Cinema Scope*. Rifling through the festival catalogue on arrival it was interesting to clock just how many of the directors showing films in Locarno this year have been championed by *Cinema Scope* in recent times. Not a few of those would also have featured in Directors' Fortnight, which Père ran from 2004 to 2009, and whose farsighted programming *Cinema Scope* was quickest to latch on to, at least in the English-speaking world. This tight nexus of tastes and interests prompts an interesting question: has any other film magazine ever been this hand in glove with one particular film festival? One of its gratifying outcomes is the quality of the recommendations and critical writing in the festival's daily paper, *the Pardo*. And you'd be hard-pressed to think of another festival director likely to reference Deleuze, Godard and Bresson in the same daily column within its pages.

First up for me was *Far from Afghanistan*, an omnibus film instigated by avant-garde leftist documentarian John Gianvito and inspired by Chris Marker's similarly collective polemic *Far From Vietnam* (Marker's death inevitably cast a massive shadow over the festival). Gianvito channels the unflaggingly militant spirit of Noam Chomsky into cinema, the avowed aim this time round – with the help of collaborators such as Jon Jost and Travis Wilkerson – to counter the seeming ignorance of, or indifference to, the violence inflicted by the US (and UK) military on innocent bystanders in Afghanistan. I preferred it at its most direct, principally the footage shot in the country by



Darkness visible: João Pedro Rodriguez and João Rui Guerra da Mata's 'The Last Time I Saw Macau'

a group of Afghan filmmakers that painted a desolate portrait of ordinary people trying to come to terms with the loss of loved ones and limbs, and eking out a precarious existence in the midst of destruction. The film is uneven and over-long, and tries to cover too many bases, but in its best moments manages to tear away the sanitising technolinguistic barriers



'Far from Afghanistan'

calculated to distance us from the full horror of yet another depressing imperialist cock-up.

"We don't make any distinctions between fiction and documentary anymore... there's a tendency for more low-budget features, which are very free and flexible to be able to deal with reality," said Olivier Père in an interview prior to the festival. It's to Père's credit that such "free and flexibles", let's call them, found numerous berths in the main competition as well as elsewhere, a prime example being Mexican-Canadian Nicolás Pereda's sixth feature *Los Mejores Temas (Greatest Hits)*. It's a warm, engaging family drama with an undertow of melancholy and bitterness, which barely steps outside its cramped domestic space somewhere in Mexico. As the paterfamilias returns after a 15-year absence, Pereda keeps piling on the ambiguities, so we're never entirely sure if what we're watching is real or fictional, or some headspinning combination of the two. If that sounds like a dry conceptual exercise, it genuinely isn't, partly thanks to a likeable



*There were bold innovators aplenty at the festival, pioneering grapplers with form, with new ways to tell a story (or not)*



'Museum Hours'

bunch of brilliant actors, and partly because Pereda knows exactly when to cut and move on, to find a new angle that will expand our awareness of the characters and the situation, so much so it ends up feeling effortless. You come away with the impression that the film could have run for 24 hours and Pereda would still be ringing the variations compellingly and convincingly. In that sense using Bach to punctuate the action made perfect sense.

If Pereda's film felt almost classical in its commingling and questioning of fictional and documentary modes, arguably evidence that such strategies are beginning to solidify into an orthodoxy, there were other more novel spins on the same – variations on the variations. One involved the charging up of off-screen space à la *Berberian Sound Studio*, the most intriguing example of which was Joao Pedro Rodriguez and Joao Rui Guerra da Mata's *A Ultima Vez Que Vi Macau* (*The Last Time I Saw Macau*). The narrator, a Portuguese man who spent a happy childhood in Macau, is begged to return 30 years later by Candy, a friend who hints at some imminent danger. We never see the narrator, and Candy only briefly in a stylised prologue. A noirish gangster tale unfolds in voiceover, accompanied by dazzling imagery of contemporary Macau, which looks seductive and melancholy and forbiddingly alien all at the same time. It's as if the actual film is happening offscreen, just out of sight and inaccessible, the absent presence of which generates a peculiar tension and makes us scrutinise more closely the real world we're shown. I found myself thinking of *Tabu*, another great Portuguese film – a return to a colonial past and setting, which for all its sins and excesses was a happier time than the present. Both films discover their own unique cinematographic language to figure some loss, something irrecoverable. The apocalyptic ending of *The Last Time I Saw Macau* practically had me levitating, with its strange, paradoxical suggestion of what might ultimately (and impossibly) constitute human happiness; particularly sad in the light of what's currently happening in Portugal.

Next door to Portugal sits Galicia in Spain, whose people and stories and landscape assume an almost mythical quality in *Arraianos*, directed by Eloy Enciso. Set in the titular village, which seems from another time altogether, or somehow out of time, it's yet another film that mixes up fiction and documentary, but under the clear influence of Straub and



'Arraianos'

Costa, with a whisper of Medem. The fictional elements draw on a 60s play set in the region, and use more declamatory speech patterns to hypnotic effect. These are mixed in with songs, villagers relating stories, less obviously staged scenes, an incredible array of natural sounds, drawing the viewer in to a strange reverie that – again – gradually assumes apocalyptic overtones. *Arraianos* was by some distance the most mysterious film I saw in Locarno, and the one I most want to see again.

How art and life interrelate is both subject-matter and formal challenge in Jem Cohen's often sublime *Museum Hours*. A middle-aged woman, played by cult singer Mary Margaret O'Hara, heads to Vienna to minister to a comatose cousin. There she befriends another lonely soul, a museum guard (played by non-actor Bobby Sommer, a wonderful, gentle screen presence) who becomes the film's narrator and her guide to the city. Their awkward rapport is intercut with evocative 16mm footage of a wintry Vienna – this is a great city cine-poem – and a tour of the paintings in the Kunsthistorisches Art museum, particularly the Breughels. Slowly but surely, the walls of the museum appear to fall away. It's a film about getting old, getting by, mortality, isolation – and the consolations of art, and the pleasures to be found in small everyday things. It's also a film of considerable conceptual sophistication, and emotional and moral intelligence. *Museum Hours* will screen at the LFF in October, and shouldn't be missed.

It was no small surprise that Jean-Claude Brisseau's *La Fille de Nulle Part* (*The Girl From Nowhere*) won the Golden Leopard, until I later recalled that Apichatpong Weerasethakul was president of the jury this year. Maybe Brisseau's low-budget yoking of the supernatural and the everyday, his portrait of spiritual awakening prior to death, its gentle, teasing indeterminacies grounded in a domestic two-hander, could conceivably appeal to the Thai master? The story of an elderly widower's friendship with a young homeless woman who moves into his flat and becomes a sort of muse to him, Brisseau's film invites us to wonder whether the woman really exists, or if she's the reincarnation of the man's dead wife, or if this is all a dying man's dream? I didn't buy it at all, despite one or two admittedly spellbinding moments. But Brisseau's bizarre win did make me ponder why festivals never screen jury discussions live? Imagine the interest, so why the elitist cloistering?



'Greatest Hits'

# NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

New technologies have created opportunities for critical debate and interaction in ways that are enriching cinephilia

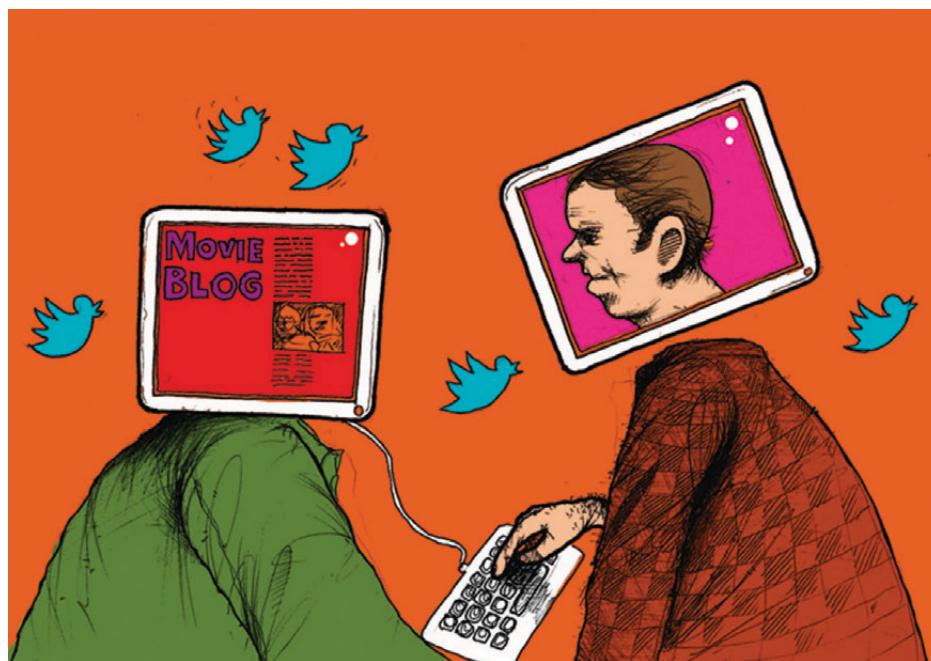
By Brad Stevens

It will hardly be news to anyone that the way in which cinema-related discussions are conducted has been changed beyond all recognition by the internet. Email, message boards, Facebook etc have created new opportunities for critical debate while erasing the line between verbal and written discourses: an observation made to a friend following a screening, a comment responding to a blog entry and an article intended for publication in a magazine are not neatly separable, but rather different stages in the development of a single impulse.

In years to come, I doubt we will be seeing the equivalents of *Britton on Film: The Complete Film Criticism of Andrew Britton* or *James Agee: Film Writings and Selected Journalism* – books that claim, whether accurately or not, to collect a critic's entire body of work. Film writing is now so widely dispersed that much of it makes sense only in the context of larger discussions that are, by their nature, ephemeral. This is not to say that such discussions are necessarily superficial or dilettantish – Dave Kehr's blog, for example, provides a forum for well-informed disputation, much of it conducted by professional critics and theorists – but rather that there's now little practical difference between an impulsive reaction and a text created for posterity.

At one extreme this has resulted in newspapers replacing seasoned film critics with celebrity reviewers who are thought to have more in common with the average viewer. But if the concept of expertise has been devalued, it has also been democratised. The kind of knowledge that was once the preserve of a privileged few is now potentially available to anyone interested in acquiring it – as Adrian Martin pointed out in his contribution to *Movie Mutations* (a collection investigating the changing face of cinephilia): "Suddenly, there were self-cultivated specialists everywhere in previously elite areas like B cinema, exploitation cinema and so-called cult cinema." In a review of my book *Abel Ferrara: The Moral Vision*, Jonathan Rosenbaum (originator of the *Movie Mutations* project) identified me as "a pioneer in a new and rigorous if relatively unambulatory kind of film research ruled by the internet and tracking down various videos and DVDs from around the world – a kind of scholarship motored by email, blogs, and chatgroups".

I must admit that at the time (2004) I didn't even know what a blog was, and tended to see myself as part of an older tradition, my inspirations being the work of Robin Wood and other auteurists. I recall reading the round-table discussions that appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Movie*, and thinking how wonderful it would be to participate in them. I have now taken part in two such round-tables: the first appeared in a booklet accompanying Masters



of Cinema's *Buster Keaton: The Complete Short Films* DVD in 2006; the second, a debate about Dario Argento's *Mother of Tears*, can be found in issue 147 of *Video Watchdog*. Both of those were conducted by email – so the 'new' internet technologies may be new only in the sense that, by obscuring the distinction between conversation and writing, they are facilitating forms of communication that are actually long-established.

But the internet has also influenced 'real world' interactions. Whereas we once tended to socialise with people to whom we had a geographic proximity, we are now more likely to seek out individuals who share our cultural interests, something encouraged by websites enabling users to create online groups for the purpose of scheduling social events. One such group is London's The Art House Cinema Meetup ([www.meetup.com/arthouse-london](http://www.meetup.com/arthouse-london)), founded by Aiman Baharna in 2008, whose eclectic selection of regulars includes Alex Barrett (writer/director of *Life Just Is*) and Sarah Bakewell (author of the Costa-nominated *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne*). An especially memorable event scheduled by this group involved a rare screening of Michael Powell's *The Queen's Guards* (1961) at BFI Southbank earlier this year. Although the film's reputation could hardly have been worse – Ian Christie, who introduced the screening, virtually apologised for it – everyone I spoke to afterwards seemed pleasantly surprised. Several members of the group who attended our post-screening discussion were familiar with *Peeping Tom*, and noted how the protagonists of both films were attempting to simultaneously imitate and rebel

*Some papers have replaced critics with celebrity reviewers thought to have more in common with the average viewer*

against their obsessively traditional fathers, the central character of *The Queen's Guards* being depicted as a helpless puppet (via the toy soldier possessed by his girlfriend) and a fly caught in a spider's web (his crippled father moves around the family home by swinging from steel bars attached to the ceiling).

One of our members, Yusef Sayed, continued this discussion in an email he sent me, observing that "the emphasis on the Captain's trolley rail system cast an eerie comment on a person's actions being determined by external barriers and guidelines. As you said, the ascent of the stairs was striking and almost spider-like. The central character, too, was obviously troubled by the feeling that he needed to fulfil a role and stick to a tradition, stay within set codes of conduct – leading to the uncertain feelings about following in his brother's footsteps... This, of course, leads to the idea of being governed by tradition, expectations, identified only by your role in society, whether a soldier or a gentleman..."

I had noticed Kim Newman heading into the screening, and subsequently posted a message on his Facebook wall, noting that *The Queen's Guards* had "reminded me of John Ford's *The Long Gray Line* (1954), another CinemaScope film in which the director's admiration for military institutions struggles with an awareness of the neuroticism of those institutions"; to which Kim responded, "I thought of the same Ford film, but also saw odd connections with that 80s cycle about being in not-really-needed services (*Top Gun*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Heartbreak Ridge*)... The nicest touch was the hero not taking his girlfriend's job as a fashion model seriously since all she does is dress up in silly clothes and pose, when it turns out that the highlight of his military career is exactly like that."

These discussions were clearly far more carefully considered than the 'official' discourses on Powell's film, demonstrating how cinephilia has been enriched by technologies all too frequently imbricated with superficiality.

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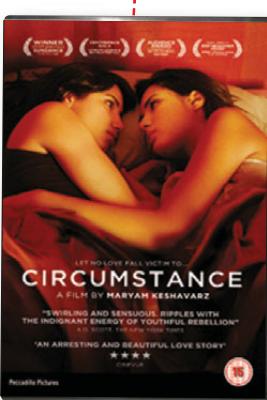


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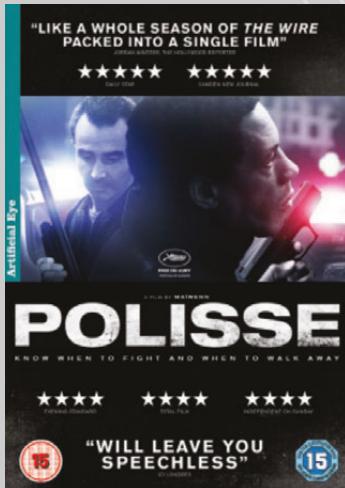
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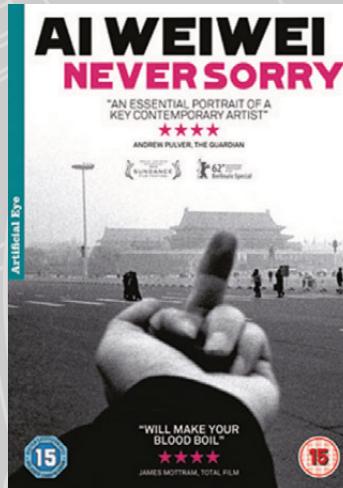
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FOR AND AGAINST

## LEOS CARAX

While still in his 20s, he shot to arthouse fame – and gave the world Juliette Binoche – before blowing it all on the big-budget flop *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*. Now past 50, he's back after a long, long absence with a film that divided the critics at Cannes, *Holy Motors*. But should we still care? Two *S&S* contributors thrash it out



Errant genius or ageing enfant terrible?: 'Holy Motors' director Leos Carax

### FOR

By Robert Koehler

*Holy Motors* is the return of Leos Carax, one of the cinema's last Romantic directors – and it announces a brand-new Carax too. His last feature *Pola X* (1999) did the same thing. It may be that Carax, like Kubrick, requires long spaces of time between projects to regroup and reassemble his own kind of cinema in a new form. *Holy Motors* was brought together fairly quickly after a string of aborted productions – a problem that has marked the director's entire career. When Carax made, in fairly rapid succession, his 1980s trilogy about *l'amour fou* – *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), *The Night Is Young* (*Mauvais Sang*, 1986) and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991), all starring his force-of-nature alter ego Denis Lavant – he showed a fast-moving intelligence steeped in the iconography and grammar of silent film as well as devotedly attached to the cause of romantic losers, plus a rock 'n' roll energy that made a vivid stamp on a then-staid French cinema.

But Carax's long absence after the financial disaster of *Les Amants* allowed him to escape from early-cinema references towards something else. This was a more intensely developed narrative tendency, a growing preference for wider focal lengths and a calmer attitude towards editing (despite having kept the same editor, Nelly Quettier, who has now worked on each of his five features). *Pola X*'s basis in Herman Melville's novel *Pierre: or The Ambiguities* set a fascinating tension between the 19th-century novel's tragic view of the misunderstood artist and the modernist experiment that wants to dislodge the viewer from sentimental attachments and characters functioning within logical realms of thought. As in Carax's first two films, the male hero in *Pola X* (here for the only time played by someone other than Lavant, the late Guillaume Depardieu) is drawn back and forth between

*'Holy Motors'* is supremely concerned with the fears and hopes of a middle-aged mind slipping daily away from youth

two women, and a level of madness takes hold of everything. Yet *Pola X* marked a clear break with the past: a maturing of vision, a deepening of feelings and a growing command of his resources.

It shouldn't surprise us, then, that *Holy Motors* amounts to a new forward stride. I had lingering worries going in: after a 13-year break, it was natural to wonder if Carax might have lost his mojo. The presence in the 2008 omnibus film *Tokyo!* of Carax's short film about Lavant's Monsieur Merde, a red-haired creature of pure id, amounted to little – a meaningless interlude among superior segments. Word was that the Merde character reappeared in *Holy Motors*. Would it mean more of the same?

No. Carax has now made his greatest film, having freed himself of all his former obsessions, which – he recognises – served him well in the past but now, for a man moving through his middle years, no longer apply. Like the television series *Breaking Bad*, *Holy Motors* is a work supremely concerned with the fears, hopes, complexes and paranoias of a middle-aged mind slipping daily away from youth and towards death. Like certain movies crafted by a director for the precise

gifts of a particular actor (the Anthony Mann/James Stewart westerns, Scorsese/De Niro, Lang/Lorre in *M*), Carax/Lavant's adventure reveals a dozen characters, all played by Lavant, shedding the skin of one and transforming into another – and all in the space of 24 hours.

Seemingly the tale of a corporate hitman named Monsieur Oscar, who then adopts various guises to carry out his assignments, *Holy Motors* engages in the sheer pleasure of the comedy of transformation as performed by a physical artist of Lavant's supreme abilities. To see the actor shift in the flash of a cut from buttoned-up Oscar planning his day in the back of his white stretch limo to a hunched beggarwoman is to be reminded of why we watch the movies – for those moments that rupture the fabric of normality.

But the movie itself transforms – and to strikingly different ends than the dramatic shifts and leaps of *Pola X*. By the time his assignment has him 'being' an ageing father on his deathbed, Oscar has to all intents and purposes vanished, and a new, malleable but older being has emerged, perhaps out of the digital warp and weft of Lavant's astonishing motion-capture performer, whose assignment to dance with a female counterpart suggests the capacity for Hollywood technology to be the stuff of visual poetry.

The middle-aged male centre of *Holy Motors* at first defies mortal limitations and, throughout the film, changes his face, bodies, attitudes, while unavoidably growing more mortal. This is the source of the film's supreme poignancy, for Oscar's avowed quest to find "the beauty in the act" of each of his assignments becomes more of an effort to achieve, even as the night comes to a close and Oscar (or is he now a post-Oscar, living with chimps?) must retire to his home – while the limo retires to slumber in the *Holy Motors* garage, where all machines go to sleep and die.

## AGAINST

**By Jonathan Romney**

This year in Cannes, I indulged in festival tweeting for the first time and, not surprisingly, found myself firing off a few intemperate instant appraisals. Not that I retract any of them, though I might want to add some nuance to my comment on Leos Carax's *Holy Motors*: "the Brown Bunny of Surrealist chic".

All things considered, Carax's film isn't quite that awful or ridiculous – but I instantly felt a strong antipathy towards it. I should say I had no expectations either way: I haven't seen Carax's early films for years, and at the very least felt a qualified admiration for his ambitious 1999 misfire *Pola X*. So I had nothing invested in *Holy Motors* being either a catastrophe or a triumphant comeback for the auteur formerly known as Alexandre Dupont. Though all in all, *Holy Motors* is precisely the kind of film I might have expected to like a great deal. The idea of film as dream is one that's extremely precious to me, especially as such cinema is

*Carax's sensibility can be gratingly crass. He plays his punk provocation card, but the humour is pedantic*

almost impossible to achieve convincingly.

Yet I can't remember when I was last put off a film as quickly as I was by Carax's prologue. The director wakes up in his pyjamas in a darkened room, puts on his dark glasses (naturally) and feels the wall for a hidden door. It opens, and a dark corridor leads him to – what else but a cinema? Why did I take against this sequence so? Because it's so brazenly self-aggrandising: "Welcome to my world," Carax is saying. "A world of strangeness, of dream. Oh, and by the way, Jean Cocteau, *c'est moi*."

The rest of the film follows Denis Lavant's protean everyman Monsieur Oscar as he glides round Paris in a limo, adopting a succession of heteroclite identities. The fragmentary narrative is built around a slender but potent premise – to wit, "one man in his time plays many parts" – from which Carax also spins off a potentially intriguing debate about the changing nature of cinematic illusion.

The basic idea is so familiar, so rooted in our modern conception of the multiple self, that a cinematic exploration of it could either yield great resonance or outright banality – and Carax comes out on the latter side. Some of Lavant's roles are striking, even outrageous (the grotesque beggarwoman he plays on the streets as puzzled crowds walk past). Others aren't as interesting, nor are the vignettes built around them. Lavant is a great physical performer, a uniquely strange and muscular presence – and the episodes that exploit his acrobatic dynamism are the most impressive. But those that require him to act in the conventional sense wear out their welcome once we've got the point: the scenes where Oscar 'plays' a dying old man or the father of a teenage girl, castigating her timidity after a party.

Carax's sensibility can also be gratingly crass. He plays his punk provocation card with the 'Monsieur Merde' sequence, in which Oscar becomes a grotesque, green-suited goblin figure (previously seen in Carax's segment of the 2008 portmanteau *Tokyo!*) who crashes a fashion shoot in a graveyard, then abducts the supermodel (Eva Mendes) and carries her off to his subterranean lair. Apart from the



Amour fou: Binoche in 'Les Amants du Pont-Neuf'

tombstones engraved with website addresses, the humour here is pedantic, sub-F Fellinian, with the Parisian exquisites cooing "He's so weird!" and incorporating Merde into their photos. There's nothing remotely interesting here until Merde puts his captive into a makeshift burqa, and by then the satirical point about objectification and oppression of women feels hard-earned, to say the least.

Some things in this film I really, really hated: the cringesome ballad sung by Kylie Minogue (just when the film had an opportunity to soar) and the bathetic coyness of the coda, where the celestial cars chatter away like puppets in a twee children's TV show. But I liked the accordion interlude, which briefly injects joyous oomph into the overall solemnity, and the strange, elegant dance of male and female motion-capture artists, an eerie *pas de deux* of elastic eroticism.

Carax undeniably builds his alien mood with craft, and DP Caroline Champetier creates an ominously thickening crepuscular atmosphere. But for me, the *Holy Motors* dream is too manifestly and knowingly manufactured (though it's surely Carax's intent to reveal his artifice throughout). Now, I'm not naive; I know all cinema is consciously created, sculpted, edited, that screen dreams cannot emerge raw and unmediated from an auteur's skull. Yet some forms of narrative cinema do persuasively approximate a trancelike or free-associative state: certain Raúl Ruiz films, the reveries of Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Others simulate the compassless navigations of sleep in a more deliberately structured way: Buñuel (*The Phantom of Liberty*), Lynch (most of all, *Eraserhead* and *Inland Empire*), Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Innocence*. Then there are those films that are oneiric in so far as, at a crucial point, they wander off the plotted path of their ostensible narrative logic to explore the tangled undergrowth at the roadside: *Vertigo*, of course, and Truffaut's underrated Vertiginous love story *Mississippi Mermaid*.

*Holy Motors*, however, constructs its visionary illusion with the single-minded, surgical intent of another excessively stage-managed recent dream-work: *Inception*. Authenticity (or compelling inauthenticity) is in the eye of the beholder, and Carax's film has no shortage of admirers. But the real (surreal) deal? Dream on, Monsieur Dupont.

**i 'Holy Motors' is released on 28 September, and is reviewed on page 89**



Alter ego: Denis Lavant in 'Holy Motors'

# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN. Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## Poll reflections

With eager anticipation I awaited the Top 100 Films list ('2012 Poll', *S&S*, September) only to feel a sense of disappointment at the earnestness of it all. Does serious cinema really have to exclude comedy, horror and sex, apart from a handful of critically acceptable examples?

Nick James writes ('Editorial', *S&S*, September) that the updating of the Rushes section was "to give a more welcoming sense of the fun in cinephilia". It would have been refreshing to have seen the Top 100 contributors adopt this philosophy and share their genuine top tens with us. Does anyone else feel the list lacks a sense of honesty and is a compilation of films that many of the contributors feel they should be voting for rather than films that they truly love?

**Wendy Boote, Stoke-on-Trent**

A poet once wrote that "life without liberty is like a body without spirit", and a Top 100 Films without the works of Michael Haneke is like a body without a brain!

**Kieron Boote, Stoke-on-Trent**

How nice to see *S&S* fave Mia Hansen-Løve naming *Eyes Wide Shut* as one of the ten films "which counted the most for me in my education". Since Kubrick's film came out, it has been 'accepted' by both ends of the critical spectrum as a disaster.

"To my mind, it's a travesty," says David Thomson in his *Biographical Dictionary of Film* – which topped *S&S*'s 2010 book poll. To my mind, it's an excellent film.

**Richard Hayson, Carlisle**

I was born in the 1940s and have been a regular cinemagoer since I was taken very young to see the westerns and Hitchcocks and other movies your critics seem so to admire. I have seen 52 of your Top 100. And I just cannot understand so many entries on the list. Did the critics and directors stop watching movies in 1960? Have they not seen *A Prophet*, *The Double Life of Véronique* or *The White Ribbon* (and so many others)?

Historical relevance is not enough. To be the greatest ever, films must be recognisable as great and be relevant to today's audience – that is why we revere (say) Shakespeare and George Eliot and not Skelton and Carew, however interesting they may be to a few obscurantists.

**John Dinning, Cardiff**

In this year when your august publication takes its ten-yearly poll of filmmakers and critics to create the 'definitive' list of the all-time greatest films ever made, my local cinema – the Curzon Community Cinema, Clevedon – has also conducted a number of polls as part of the celebrations for its centenary (which makes it amongst the oldest continuously operational cinemas in Europe, if not the world!).

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST



I enjoyed Ian Christie's reflection on the 2012 Poll and the shift from 'Citizen Kane' to 'Vertigo' ('Chronicle of a Fall Foretold', *S&S*, September). Christie also discusses the Western bias evidenced by the near-invisibility of filmmaking from India and Africa (and we can add Latin America) in the Top 100. Yet in relation to the spectre of elitism and Eurocentrism surrounding any such canon, as noted in the new Forum section, the top two films are striking in one respect that was not mentioned by anyone. Both 'Vertigo' (above) and 'Citizen Kane' are prime canonical films because both explore how memory informs our lives, and how we record our existence in history – specifically US history in these two films.

If we were to follow the inspiration of certain French thinkers, from Henri Bergson through Marcel Proust (with whose 'Madeleine' Hitchcock has such fun in 'Vertigo') to Gilles Deleuze, this emphasis on memory at the peak

of the poll might be interpreted as a reflection on our understanding of cinema's ability to function as a giant world memory or virtual archive. On the other hand, if we were to draw inspiration from Latin American philosophers like Enrique Dussel, such a top two might reflect the introversion and solipsism of Western thinking since Descartes: film as selective Western memory of history – only an expression of how we remember our past.

Interestingly, in this respect, 'Vertigo' – somewhat differently to 'Citizen Kane' – uses its play with history to uncover the imperial legacy of the US past, and the process of manufacturing an all-white image of the present upon a history of miscegenation. Even so, this distinction remains arguably of more interest to Western self-reflection than to the rest of the world, who remember history very differently in the wealth of films not included in the canon.

**David Martin-Jones by email**

This consisted of three separate polls: one for the general public to choose their favourite films shown at the Curzon throughout its history (although as there are few, if any, locals left alive who would remember the earliest days of the cinema, the reality was that the poll mostly covered the period from the 1950s onwards, though a few earlier films did sneak in); one for members of the Curzon Film Club to choose their favourite film; and a final poll for the Film Club committee members (of whom I pride myself on being one!) to choose the top three Hitchcock films (to be shown in a special film-club triple bill later in the autumn).

The results were, in reverse order: Hitchcock films: 3) *The Lodger* (silent version – chosen mainly so we can show this classic in our little town!); 2) *Vertigo*; 1) *Psycho*. The most popular Film Club film: 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. And the winner for the general public? *Citizen Kane*? Nope! *Gone with the*

*Wind*? Nope! Maybe a classic Ealing Comedy? Nope! The winner was... *Mamma Mia!!!*

Now I am not sure what this says about the good folk of Clevedon and its environs, but I think the current manager of the Curzon summed it up best when, on discovering the result, he said (with tongue firmly in his cheek): "Oh good grief... Well, that's what you get when you invite the great unwashed to vote."

**Kevin Rawlings, Clevedon, North Somerset**

## The meaning of greatness

I enjoyed Brad Stevens's column ('Bradlands', *S&S*, September) and share his opinion that the truly 'greatest' films are those which have particularly affected us at a deep subliminal level, often several viewings prior to our understanding intellectually or realising enjoyment, affection or empathy. For such films to be heralded as the 'greatest' would change many submitted lists, perhaps producing



ones more personal than those we have before us. I'd be fascinated to see the results of such a poll; however I also appreciate that many film lovers would not wholly care for our self-centric definition of greatness.

**Richard Maddox, London**

#### Facets of 'Vertigo'

Thanks for Peter Matthews's appreciation of *Vertigo* ('2012 Poll', *S&S*, September). Since the film now stands atop the Critics' Poll, perhaps some precisions are helpful. In the actual (recorded) Truffaut-Hitchcock interview, Hitchcock spoke not of the "flaw in the story" but of "the hole in it". And "bothers" was the word of the interpreter, Helen Scott, not Hitchcock's own. (The published version takes considerable liberties.)

At the time of the interviews (1962), what most troubled Hitchcock about *Vertigo* was Kim Novak. "I had a terrible actress in it," was one of his first comments, but one that did not make it into print. Despite Truffaut's several urgings, Hitchcock failed to acknowledge that Novak's touch of commonness made her performance all the more credible, and the film the more impressive.

**Ray Lahey, Toronto, Canada**

I have greatly enjoyed the recent *S&S* writing on Hitchcock, particularly Neil Brand on composing music for *Blackmail* (*S&S*, July) and Guillermo del Toro's piece 'Lessons of Darkness' (*S&S*, August). However I am a little disappointed that, in discussing Hitchcock's influence on later contemporaries, the distinguished Mexican director should have omitted to mention Hitchcock as an artistic presence in Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* and in Resnais's friend Chris Marker's masterpiece *La Jetée*.

The thematic affinities between these two films and *Vertigo* shouldn't be ignored. All of them are extended dramatisations of a struggle to revivify, restore and bring to fulfilment sexual-love relations which have been abruptly – too abruptly – abridged: a love actually extinguished by nuclear war in the case of *La Jetée*; another love probably terminated by death in *Marienbad*; and – seemingly, if misleadingly – one ended by death, too, in *Vertigo*.

In the matter of stylistic affinities, it might also be noted that Kim Novak's comportment, when playing Madeleine in the first half of Hitchcock's film, very much resembles at times the stylised deportment of the actors in *Marienbad*, especially Delphine Seyrig.

**John Owston**

*Southall, Middlesex*

#### The new look

As a writer on a magazine with a similar manifesto to satisfy both industry and consumer audiences (albeit with regard to videogames), and one that itself went through a revamp in print and online recently, I can attest to how tricky it can be to get the balance in features, columns and general content right. How much do you change? How much do you keep the same?

Can I simply say "Well done," then, on an outstanding redesign. The new furniture is a welcome distraction (*The Dark Knight Rises* as 2 per cent *The Trial* is wonderfully observed and absurd) and the more in-depth lead reviews are long overdue. I can only imagine how much instant coffee was consumed and how many late-night office lock-ins were required to get that beautiful, bloody first issue out the door. Just remember, now you've got to do it every month.

**David Valjalo, 'Edge' magazine**

Mr Busy wondered a year or two ago whether anybody actually read him. I felt like writing back: "Don't be ridiculous, pal. If you go, I (as a reader) go" – since, first thing each issue, I went straight to that page. I'm not sure I can deliver on the threat now, but no matter how bulky the new-look *S&S* is, for me it will be one page lighter.

**Tony Keily, By email**

Really sorry, don't like the look, size, feel of the new-look *S&S*. It's a step back. It really feels like a Sunday supplement magazine. There was always such a sumptuous, 'quality' look and feel, and now it's suddenly gone.

Won't stop my subscription, but felt I had to say it.

**David Hoddel, By email**

#### Ghostly presences

In his perceptive and informative review of the DVD release of the BBC's adaptations of M.R. James's ghost stories (*S&S*, September), Tony Earnshaw states that *Night of the Demon* is the only "bona fide movie" made from the stories. Not so! Hideo Nakata's 1997 film *Ringu* (*The Ring*) – surely one of the most successful and influential horror films of recent years – is actually a conflation of three stories by James: 'Casting the Runes' provides the central device of a curse which can only be averted by passing on to someone else the cursed object (a strip of paper in the story, a videocassette in the film); 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas' is the source of the excavation in the well; and 'The Mezzotint' furnishes the picture containing a figure which emerges from the background, moves toward the viewer and, ultimately, out of the frame.

**Dave Howell, Ilkley, West Yorkshire**

#### Additions and corrections

**September** p.56 '2012 Poll'. Unfortunately, we have belatedly discovered a few errors in 'The Top 100 Films'. They are as follows: *Rashomon* climbs to joint 24th place (with *Andrei Rublev* falling to 27th place as a result); *Psycho* jumps up to joint 34th place (with *Jeanne Dielman*, *Metropolis* and *Sátántangó* falling to joint 36th); *Fritz Lang's M* rises to joint 53rd place (with *Touch of Evil* and *The Leopard* falling to joint 57th). One extra film has also entered the Top 100: *Fear Eats the Soul* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, which is now joint 93rd. Corrections have been made to our complete online poll at [explore.bfi.org.uk/sightandsoundpolls/2012](http://explore.bfi.org.uk/sightandsoundpolls/2012).

p. 95 *The Bird*, Cert 12A, 94m 0s, 8,460 ft + frames; p.97 *Circumstance*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video cert 15, 101m 51s; p.100 *The Forgiveness of Blood*, Cert 12A, 109m 32s, 9,858 ft + frames; p.103 *Lawless*, Cert 18, 115m 39s, 10,408 ft + 8 frames; p.104 *Leave It on the Floor*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video cert 15, 105m 46s; p.107 *Offender*, Cert 15, 101m 35s, 9,142 ft + 8 frames; p.108 *The Queen of Miami*, Cert PG, 100m 35s, 9,052 ft + 8 frames; p.112 *Step Up Miami Heat*, Cert PG, 99m 35s (after cuts of 5 seconds), 8,914 ft + 8 frames; p.115 *The Wedding Video*, Cert 15, 93m 56s, 8,454 ft + frames

**August** p.57 *A Fantastic Fear of Everything*: Perkins was the name of the kidnapper, not Smythe as the synopsis mentioned.

#### Andrew Male @AndrewMaleMojo

The Greatest Films issue deftly refutes all that nonsense about 'Lists in Magazines'. It is deep, rich, erudite and sharp.

#### Bret Easton Ellis @BretEastonEllis

*Vertigo*: bored at 17, mildly interested at 28, beyond devastated at 37. From then on I've considered it the most beautiful film ever....

#### David Hughes @Groovyfokker

*Vertigo* has only supplanted *Citizen Kane* in the #sightsoundpoll because voters are dazzled by that new-fangled 'colour'.

#### Roger Ebert @ebertchicago

At least the *Sight & Sound* list is still headed by a great film about which a lot of people tell me, "I don't see what's so great about it."

#### Michael Cusumano @SeriousFilm

Let *S&S* do a poll of the greatest scenes where someone totally fucks up a bedroom. Then we'll see who's better than *Kane*.

#### Nick Alexander @NickAlexCath

Of the top 10 movies of all time, I've seen 8½. The one I couldn't finish was called 8½.

#### Ehsan Khoshbakht @EhsanKhoshbakht

No Iranian film critic? In Iran more than 15 film journals exist, some as old as *S&S*.

#### Alex In Movieland @AlexInMovieland

Those guys who voted *Salò* or *The 120 Days of Sodom*... I'm not inviting them over for dinner.

#### Cameron Bray @cameronjbray

Am I in the minority in thinking old movies suck and that this list is baloney?

#### James Nee @Jamesnee

Really impressed with the new-look *S&S*. More colour, better layout & use of images, less academic-looking. A big improvement.

#### Joseph Fahim @JoeKubrick

Finally received the September issue. I'm drooling. Love the new Mark Cousins column and 'Object Lessons'.

#### Robert Nishimura @PrimolandiaPro

A @SightSoundmag on my iPad? Feels like the most natural thing in the world.

#### Joe Stephenson @JoeStephenson

Loving the *S&S* iPad app. You don't buy a month's issue for £3.99, but a month's access to the issue & all back issues. Clever.

#### Oshea Green @OsheaGreen

Oh man, if you hover over a title in the review section of the *S&S* digital edition, it takes you to a trailer (where available).

#### Mike W @garbo\_talks

Damn, I wish I knew the *S&S* digital archives were coming before I amassed this pile...

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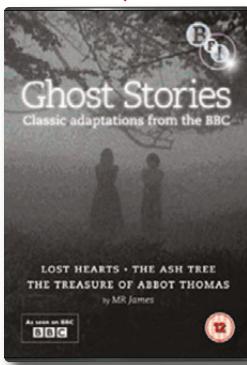
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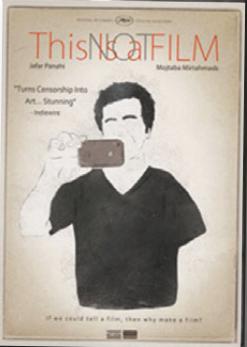


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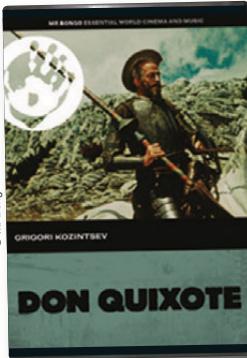
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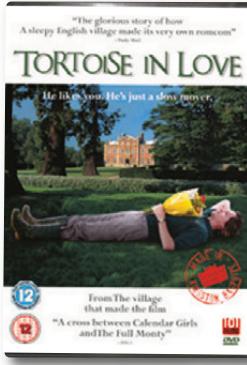
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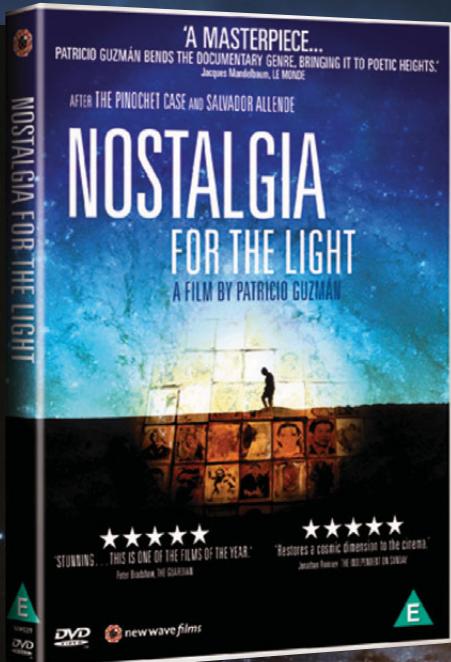
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# Reviews

## 72 Films of the month



## 82 Films



## 110 Home Cinema



## 122 Books



## 82 Anna Karenina

*Despite its initial flirtation with high kitsch, Joe Wright's film is one of the strongest adaptations of Tolstoy's novel. What makes it work is not the showy effects but the intelligence and intensity of the performances*



## About Elly

France/Iran 2009  
Director: Asghar Farhadi

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

With his most recent feature, *A Separation*, Asghar Farhadi picked up a well-deserved slew of international awards, culminating in the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film – making him the first Iranian director to win an Oscar. On the strength of that acclaim we now have his previous film, 2009's *About Elly* – with the one before that, *Fireworks Wednesday* (2006), due out on DVD in the autumn. On the strength of two films so far, this reverse exploration of his back catalogue should be a revelatory experience.

*About Elly* starts with a group of friends driving fast through a tunnel, yelling with exuberance at the prospect of a weekend's holiday. It ends two days later on a Caspian beach with them trying – without much success – to push one of their cars clear of the encroaching waves. These bookending images accurately reflect the film's trajectory: from carefree exhilaration to bleak, bogged-down misery. A life has been lost, self-respect shattered, friendships and possibly marriages destroyed; there'll be no happy shouting in the tunnel on their return journey.

Here as in his subsequent film, Farhadi focuses mainly on the Tehrani upper-middle-class – educated, cultured, pleasure-seeking, only marginally religious. On the face of it, he's venturing nowhere near the dangerous territory that led his colleague Jafar Panahi to be censored and jailed by Iran's ruling ayatollahs. Yet as in *A Separation*, it's not hard to detect a subtext: a critique of the lies and evasions that permeate Iranian society.

Three married couples, all friends from their college days, set out for a few days' villa break on the shores of the Caspian. Along with them they bring two unattached individuals. Ahmad, the brother of one of the wives (played by Shahab Hosseini, the working-class husband in *A Separation*), is over from Germany, having recently got divorced from his German wife. Elly, a sweet rather shy girl in her early 20s, is a teacher; one of her pupils is Morvarid, the young daughter of another of the wives, Sepideh. Sepideh has talked Elly into coming along in the hope that she and Ahmad may link up. What she knows – but no one else in the group does – is that Elly is already engaged, something that only emerges towards the end of the film.

It's from this initial deception that the whole disastrous sequence unfurls. Despite its title, Farhadi's film is really less about Elly than about Sepideh. As played by Golshifteh Farahani (*Body of Lies*) she's charming, vivacious, the unacknowledged leader of the group – and dangerously prone to believing that matters can always be adjusted to suit her desires. On their arrival at the villa complex, it turns out that the villa they wanted for the weekend is only free for one night – and that Sepideh knew this, but didn't mention it to the others, working on the assumption that "something could be arranged". She then persuades the caretaker to open a disused villa for them on the pretext that Ahmad and Elly are newlyweds – a lie that not only leads to Elly's embarrassment, but will later backfire badly when her fiancé Alireza shows up.



**Secrets and lies: Sepideh (Golshifteh Farahani, left) invites Elly (Taraneh Alidousti) on a fateful trip**

At first, though, the group's high spirits are undampened. Reverting to the carefree mood of their college days they dance, sing, horse around, joke about the unlockable toilet door, even play charades – in which Elly is induced to join, though always with a hint of reserve. At this stage the only discordant note comes from the caretaker's young son, who has shown himself to the villa. While the adults fool around we get a brief shot of him watching, his expression blank and unreadable. It's a moment that recalls the glance exchanged between the two little girls towards the end of *A Separation*, as the behaviour of their respective parents deteriorates ever further.

The film's last moment of unshadowed joy comes when Elly, left alone to look after the kids, runs up and down the beach flying a kite to entertain them. Farhadi's camera follows first her, then the kite, with lyrical swooping

movements that mirror her delight and theirs. It's the last time we see her alive. Barely a minute later her pupil, Sepideh's daughter Morvarid, comes running to the men playing volleyball behind the villa, crying that Peyman's son Arash is "in the water". And the handheld camera, a moment ago so enraptured, now mimics the mood of panic as the men (the other two wives are away buying food) rush frantically about, shouting contradictory orders to each other, before Ahmad rescues the boy.

"Cinema audiences have grown more mature," Farhadi has remarked, "and directors can no longer be content with force-feeding them a set of preconceived ideas... A film must open up a space in which the public can involve themselves in a personal reflection, and evolve from consumers to independent thinkers." As in *A Separation*, we're not told what to think of these characters but left to make up our minds, with no laudable figure we can easily identify with. Once it's clear that Elly has vanished, perhaps drowned, the friends start to turn on each other, trying to shift responsibility or assign blame, even bad-mouthing the absent Elly. Nobody shows up well.

Lies are exposed, new ones concocted. Sepideh is forced to admit that she knew the young woman was engaged, but now claims

***With the silencing of Panahi, and the self-exile of Kiarostami and the Makhmalbafs, Farhadi may be the most powerful voice within the Iranian film industry***



Elly was unhappy with the engagement and wanted to break it off. By this stage, though, we can't know if this is another self-exculpating lie. Not that Sepideh is alone in this. Despite frequent pronouncements that "the best thing to do is tell the truth" virtually every member of the group continues to pile lie upon lie, to each other and even to themselves, almost it seems as a reflex action. Here too, Farhadi's camerawork mirrors this intricate complex

of deceit, often roaming around the villa in long unbroken takes, picking out expressions of resentment or mistrust, flitting from one character to another as if weaving the skein of untruths that binds them unhappily together as the mood darkens towards final desolation. Violence breaks out: Amir beats his wife Sepideh, afterwards remorsefully claiming he's never done it before, and when Alireza arrives and hears of the 'newlyweds'



The film's last moment of joy comes when Elly flies a kite on the beach to entertain the children

fiction he hits Ahmad. But it's the verbal assaults that do the most damage, as we watch relationships fracture and crumble.

It's of a piece with Farhadi's aversion to 'force-feeding' his audience that, apart from a plangent 'Song for Elly' over the final credits, he makes no use of music to direct the mood of the action, relying instead on script, lighting, camera technique and the skills of his ensemble cast to convey what he intends. Comparisons have been made with *L'Avventura* (1960), but apart from their similar motivating incidents the two films have little in common. Antonioni is largely indifferent to the dynamics of the group after their friend has vanished, while for Farhadi it's the chief rationale of his emotionally devastating film. "A bitter ending is better than an endless bitterness," Ahmad tells Elly, quoting his ex-wife. As it turns out, he and his friends must endure both.

With the silencing of Panahi, and the self-exile of Kiarostami and the Makhmalbaf clan, it's evident that Farhadi is potentially the most powerful and individual voice operating within the Iranian film industry. If he can avoid antagonising the ever-touchy ayatollahs, he seems set to become a major creative force in world cinema. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Asghar Farhadi  
Mahmoud Razavi

**Written by**  
Asghar Farhadi

**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Hossein Jafarian

**Editor**  
Hayedeh Safiyari

**Art Director**  
Asghar Farhadi

**Music**  
Andrea Bauer

**Sound Recordist**  
Hassan Zahedi

**Costume Designer**  
Asghar Farhadi

**Production**

**Companies**

Simaye Mehr  
and Dreamlab  
present a film by  
Asghar Farhadi

**Cast**  
Golshifteh Farahani  
Sepideh

**Taraneh Alidousti**

**Elly**

**Shahab Hosseini**

**Ahmad**

**Merila Zarei**

**Shohreh**

**Mani Haghighi**

**Amir**

**Peyman Moaadi**

**Peyman**

**Rana Azadivar**

**Nassi**

**Ahmad Mehranfar**  
Manouchehr  
**Saber Abar**  
Alireza

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Axiom Films

Iranian theatrical title  
**'Darbareye Elly'**

**Present-day Iran.** Three middle-class couples from Tehran who are old friends from college – Amir and Sepideh, Peyman and Shohreh, Manouchehr and Nassi – drive with their children to the seaside for the weekend. Also with them are Nassi's brother Ahmad, recently divorced, and Sepideh's daughter's teacher, Elly. Sepideh has talked Elly into coming in the hope that she and Ahmad will get together. Arriving at the villa they're told it's only available for one night, which Sepideh knew but hoped they could circumvent. After the caretaker is told (out of Elly's hearing) that Ahmad and Elly are newlyweds, he lets them take another villa right on the beach. They pass a convivial evening, but the next morning Elly tells Sepideh she must return to Tehran. Sepideh tries to talk her into staying, and hides her bag. Sepideh and Shohreh drive to the shops, leaving Nassi to look after the children, who are playing on the beach. Nassi goes indoors, entrusting the kids to Elly. Later, Sepideh's daughter comes crying that Peyman's son Arash is in the water, apparently drowning. Ahmad rescues him but there's no sign of Elly. Everyone searches for her. They debate whether she drowned trying to rescue Arash, or ran off home. The police are called and, suspicious, they question the friends. Left alone again, the friends hurl accusations at each other. Finding Elly's phone in her bag they call her mother, and then her fiancé Alireza. Sepideh admits she knew Elly was engaged. Alireza arrives and, hearing from the caretaker about the 'newlyweds', attacks Ahmad. The police find Elly's body. The friends try to push their car clear of the waves.



**Semi-detached:** in her latest role for director Christian Petzold, Nina Hoss plays Barbara, a doctor in internal exile in East Germany

## Barbara

Germany 2012

Director: Christian Petzold

**Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley**

Christian Petzold's *Barbara* opens in a nameless no man's land somewhere in rural Germany. Heavily made-up, clad in a mid-length denim skirt and neat heels, the eponymous heroine gets off a bus and lights a cigarette outside the hospital where she will shortly start work. All we know of her is that she is a doctor, that she has recently been incarcerated, and that "if she were a six-year-old we'd call her sulky". This latter description comes from the anonymous man briefing André Reiser (Ronald Zehrfeld), the hospital's chief medic, on his new assistant. The two men regard the cool blonde warily from their vantage point, high up in the hospital's offices.

It takes some 40 minutes before we begin to understand where we are and what Barbara's crime might have been. We hear a passing



reference to "the socialist workhouses"; see Barbara's lover Jörg (Mark Waschke) deliver a covert package of stockings and cigarettes. An elderly man discusses his four-year wait to purchase a Mercedes; a radio blares out news of an Olympic silver medal for runner Christiane Wartenberg. Little by little, the realisation dawns that we are in 1980s East Germany. The sinister figure surveying Barbara in the opening scenes is Stasi officer Klaus Schütz (Rainer Bock); the offence she has committed was against the socialist state (most likely applying for an exit visa). Despite Schütz's regular searches of the shoddy apartment she's been assigned and also, via a female officer, of her body, Barbara is determined to join Jörg in the West. With the premise thus filled in, we wait to see if and how Barbara will escape the GDR and – perhaps more importantly – whether we want her to.

Petzold has long been fascinated with Germany's ongoing east-west dichotomy, but previous films have been primarily concerned with the legacy of the Berlin Wall and its fall. His feature debut *The State I Am In* (2000) examined the consequences of life on the run

for the 15-year-old daughter of a couple with a terrorist past, hinting obliquely at a Baader-Meinhof connection. Follow-up *Wolfsburg* (2003), on the surface a melodrama about the consequences of a hit-and-run, gave way to a study of social mobility in a town being revitalised by industry after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. *Ghosts* (2005) and *Yella* (2007) portrayed contemporary Germany as a grim, hard, industrial environment, where identity is shifting and unstable and people



**Above:** Barbara with lover Jörg (Mark Waschke)



scour one another for signs of the truth, or hood themselves defensively as they glance away. A knock at the door has the power to paralyse.

Petzold and his lead Nina Hoss, present in every one of the film's scenes, unfurl her character with magnificent delicacy. This is their fifth collaboration, and his precise direction is mirrored in a minimalist performance that could perhaps only be matched by the likes of Isabelle Huppert. Hoss's Barbara begins the film with a haughty demeanour and impassive visage ("Don't be so separate," André chides her, regarding her sideways from behind the wheel of a car). However, as circumstances conspire to draw Barbara into the community, there are snatched glimpses of compassion and warmth behind the icy defiance. She shows a genuine concern for her patients, bonding easily with runaway Stella (Jasna Fritzi Bauer), a troubled teen suffering from meningitis, and who, to Barbara's alarm, also turns out to be pregnant. Reading to her charge from Mark Twain, tenderly stroking her hair, Barbara lets her mask slip slightly. Her lips twitch. The merest hint of a smile appears in her eyes.

And as she becomes less wary, so too do we. As the film moves into its second half, the camera goes in closer, offering a greater preponderance of point-of-view shots and close-ups. In fact, the entire film hinges on the audience's gradual transition from looking *at* Barbara – scanning her features for signs of her inner life – to looking *with* Barbara, working out who is an ally and who an enemy. As André, the shaggy-haired, soft-eyed Zehrfeld is just unreadable enough to keep us guessing. Even while the film approaches its understated climax, when André's prickly relationship with Barbara has softened to a nervous alliance, his loyalties remain uncertain. Two of the film's most tense scenes – masterpieces of subtext – consist of André simply describing an artwork to his colleague. As he talks quietly, didactically, about a Rembrandt painting or a Turgenev novella, the words are weighted with potential double meanings. Are these stories a consolation or a threat?

merely play at life. The thematic exception is *Jerichow* (2008), in which Petzold shifted his attention to the more recent issues of immigration and the Afghanistan war, and yet there too the ghosts of the past lingered.

In some respects, then, *Barbara* marks something of a reverse step for Petzold, looking back to an earlier moment, before the country was supposedly unified. Here the question – both for those within the film and those watching – is one of whom to trust. The script, written in consultation with Harun Farocki, is finely attuned to the atmosphere of suspicion and subterfuge that pervades surveillance states, in which affection and intimidation become indistinguishable from one another. Barbara's pokey flat and even the sterile, whitewashed hospital are bathed in dim light and half shadows which make it hard to see. Characters are framed separately, at obtuse angles, through doorways and curtain-framed windows. There's little sign of Petzold's usual fascination for objects – in particular cars and clothing: nothing gives these people away except their actions, and even those are unreliable. They speak in whispers. Their eyes

**Christian Petzold's script is finely attuned to the atmosphere of suspicion and subterfuge that pervades surveillance states**

Despite critical acclaim and a number of award nominations, Petzold's previous work has been largely overlooked by international audiences. This is partly because *Wolfsburg* and *Yella* lack the news value of works such as *The Lives of Others* (2006) or *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), but also because they refuse emotional manipulation. Like his heroine, Petzold has frequently been accused of being overly detached, his films glacial. In *Barbara* (which won Petzold the Silver Bear for best director at this year's Berlin Film Festival), the urban Germany of those earlier works – all minimalist modern interiors, grey steel and brushed aluminium, Audis and injection pumps – is transformed by DP Hans Fromm into a palette of browns, ambers, greens and blues, infusing the film with a soft-focus warmth that stands in counterpoint to the chilly gusts of wind blowing ceaselessly through the small town and the woods surrounding it.

The timeless aesthetic and uncanny setting lend a 'there but for the grace of God' quality to the film, forcing us into closer proximity with Barbara's situation. And as we reach the closing act, the possibility for redemption enters Petzold's purview. As André and Barbara are finally shot together, facing one another, Hoss's hard-set mouth finally breaks into a full smile. The moment of release foreshadows Barbara's ultimate, quasi-maternal sacrifice, which transforms the film in its dying moment from thriller to melodrama and imbues all that has gone before with an uncharacteristically moral undertone. For Barbara, detachment is a mode of survival, for Petzold an aesthetic strategy. But by the film's conclusion, it seems that both may have softened somewhat. Neither is worse off for it. **•**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producers

Florian Koerner von Gustorf  
Michael Weber  
**Written by**  
Christian Petzold

### Director of Photography

Hans Fromm

### Editor

Bettina Böhler  
**Art Director**  
K.D. Gruber

### Music

Stefan Will  
**Sound Recordist**  
Andreas Mücke-Niesytka  
**Costume Designer**  
Anette Guther  
  
©Schramm Film,  
ZDF, Arte

### Production Companies

Schramm Film

Koerner & Weber in co-production with ZDF and ARTE  
Sponsored by § Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, BKM Kulturelle Filmförderung des Bundes, FFA Filmförderungsanstalt, DFFF Deutscher Filmförderfonds

### Cast

**Nina Hoss**  
Barbara Wolff  
**Ronald Zehrfeld**  
André Reiser  
**Mark Waschke**  
Jörg  
**Jasna Fritzi Bauer**  
Stella  
**Rainer Bock**  
Klaus Schütz  
**Christina Hecke**  
Junior Doctror

**Schulze**  
**Claudia Geisler**  
Stationmaster  
**Schlösser**  
**Peter Weiss**  
**Carolin Haupt**  
medical students  
**Deniz Petzold**  
Angelo  
**Rosa Enskat**  
Bungert, concierge  
**Mario**  
Jannik Schümann

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**  
  
**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

**East Germany, 1980. Dr Barbara Wolff has been transferred from her prestigious position in Berlin to a rural hospital following her incarceration for an unnamed crime. Silent and watchful, Barbara keeps herself apart from her new colleagues, including amiable head doctor André. She is under surveillance by the Stasi – her apartment and body are subject to regular searches – and she suspects André of being an informer. Barbara collects a packet of money from a contact at a nearby hotel. Some time later she meets her lover Jörg, who brings her black-market supplies of stockings and cigarettes from the West.**

**At the hospital, she performs her duties with diligence and professionalism. She forms a particular bond with Stella, an escapee from a local socialist**

**work camp, and is distraught when the pregnant teen is forcibly sent back there. Jörg informs her during a tryst that she will be collected the following weekend and smuggled into Denmark. The morning of the assignation, Barbara makes a crucial discovery about another patient, Mario, which means that she and André – to whom she has been growing closer – will have to perform emergency surgery that evening. She shares a kiss with André, promising to see him later, but fails to arrive at the hospital that evening, choosing to keep her appointment on the beach. However, as Barbara is about to leave, an injured Stella arrives on her doorstep. Barbara tends to her wounds and sends Stella to Denmark in her place. The next morning, she returns to the hospital, and to André.**



Criminal justice: 'Dredd' takes place in a more or less recognisable world, with Mega-City One created with light-touch CGI from footage of Johannesburg

## Dredd

Director: Pete Travis

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller



Hope seldom glimmers in Alex Garland's sci-fi scripts. *28 Days Later* (2002) ends with most of the British population wiped out by zombies and the future of its survivors uncertain; *Sunshine* (2007) concerns a suicide mission of doubtful efficacy in outer space; and the young clones of *Never Let Me Go* (2010), bred to give up their vital organs in early adulthood, see no way of resisting when they discover their fate. Judge Dredd (Karl Urban), decidedly a comic-strip hero rather than a graphic novel protagonist, isn't much given to introspection and, being permanently encased in a visored helmet, isn't easy to read, but he doesn't seem to be under any illusion about the futility of his role. Home to 800 million lost souls, Mega-City One – beyond which lies the Cursed Earth, a post-nuclear wasteland – is doomed. Paired with psychic trainee Judge Anderson (Olivia Thirlby) and told not to throw her in at the deep end on her first day on patrol, he growls: "It's all the deep end."

Garland takes a similar tack when inducting the audience, eschewing the customary origin story in favour of immersion. We don't know why Dredd is as he is, nor why Mega-City

One is as it is, and it's something of a relief. It is difficult to imagine Dredd's life before or outside his work – no lost parents, childhood sweetheart or special powers for him – but there is explanation enough in the production design. Apart from a prologue in which Dredd instigates a lethal car chase simply to catch a drug user, raising the possibility that the Judges do as much harm as good, *Dredd* covers a routine assignment, chosen at random. Three men have been skinned alive and thrown from the top of a 200-storey mega-block for all to see, and Dredd and Anderson have to determine who did it and punish them. Gunfights and ethical dilemmas ensue when they take top "perp" Kay (Wood Harris) prisoner, and his gang blocks all exits with great metal blast-proof shutters.

There is probably no such thing as unselfconscious pulp, but *Dredd* is at least not outwardly self-conscious. Its extreme violence is thoroughly unironic. The elements of the plot, including the rookie-mentor dynamic, are bolted together from stock parts, but their familiarity is not remarked upon. Dredd himself takes an impatient gamer's – or dramaturge's – attitude towards exposition. When Anderson deduces from Kay that the reason for the gang's decision to trap them inside the Peach Trees block is that the building houses a secret factory turning out a drug called Slo-Mo, Dredd just replies "Interesting" before getting on with

the business of ascending to the top level. Only fleetingly is the film diverted from its organising principle of delivering sensation.

To that end, the design of Peach Trees's hollow centre maximises the depth of the 3D image, while the effect of Slo-Mo on its users motivates extreme slow-motion photography – the two conjoining in stretched out shots of falling bodies. For similar reasons perhaps, Anderson, unlike every other Judge, doesn't wear a helmet because it would get in the way of Olivia Thirlby's fine bone structure (though strictly it is because it would interfere with Anderson's psychic powers). In truth, a film in which the eyes of both of the leads were obscured from view might be hard to endure: the makers of the first *Judge Dredd* (1995) contrived to lose Dredd's helmet as soon as possible, to reveal the expressive features of Sylvester Stallone.

Karl Urban's square jaw does all that could be asked of it, but doubt and other common human attributes are not part of Dredd's repertoire, and it is in Thirlby's reactions that they are registered. In the film's central conflict, Dredd affects to embody the law while Anderson is a kind of one-woman jury system.

When psychotic gang leader Ma-Ma (Lena Headey) who is seeking to corner the drugs trade, locks down Peach Trees just as the Judges are on the point of taking Kay away for "questioning", it becomes



*The film eschews the customary origin story in favour of immersion. We don't know why Dredd is as he is, nor why Mega-City One is as it is, and it's something of a relief*



**The action takes place in a 200-storey building housing a drugs factory run by a psychotic gangster**

clear that to protect her operation she is as happy to kill him as to rescue him.

As a result of her gift Anderson is 99 per cent sure that Kay is guilty of murder, the sentence for which is death, and intimates that they might as well execute him and get out alive. Dredd, on the other hand, while showing no compunction about beating answers out of their prisoner, does not consider that her intuition meets the burden of proof. Kay must be accorded due process, even if dozens of perps have to be gunned down for "attempted murder of a Judge" along the way. For Anderson the question is less clear-cut: although she has severe qualms killing an injured man for the same crime (she goes through with it nonetheless), executing Kay would end the standoff and prevent more citizens being killed in the crossfire.

In striking contrast with Christopher Nolan's Batman films, their plots grossly contorted in the construction of clumsily conceived and self-importantly rendered allegories, all of this is deftly woven into the action without impeding its flow or distending its shape. Dredd is regularly described as a fascist, or as the agent of a fascist regime, but in this film at least the Judges scarcely constitute a state at all, standing not above the fray but as mere participants in the war of all against all. Dredd's own solitary position borders on black-comic absurdity: he believes in disinterested administration of the law, whatever that law may be, however severe its penalties, however self-defeating. Early on, Anderson, who grew up in one of the blocks, says she wants to make a difference; Dredd's typically laconic response ("admirable") is what he is obliged to say as her supervisor, but whether he means it is anybody's guess – one instance in which his inherent inscrutability enriches the film.

Our own monster urban sprawls may not have quite caught up with the mega-cities imagined by Carlos Ezquerra in the first Judge Dredd strips in the late 1970s, but the gap is closing, and *Dredd* takes place in a more or less recognisable world – specifically Johannesburg, whose CGI treatment, as in *District 9* (2009), has been slight and skilful enough to leave a palpable sense of the original. Though resonances with reality are wisely kept out of the fiction proper, an

early establishing shot contains riot footage that may well be authentic. Inside Peach Trees, meanwhile, production designer Mark Digby, who also worked on *28 Days Later* and *Never Let Me Go*, has created an uncanny environment that melds the grimy 1980s futurism that the comics helped usher in, with the grim urban architecture that inspired them. A regular criticism of the design of British council estates was its tendency to create inward-looking spaces – in Peach Trees it is made intensely literal.

Twelve years after the first *X-Men* (2000) sparked it off, I would welcome an indefinite moratorium on the current cycle of comic-book adaptations, most of which have all too successfully mastered the trick of pandering to their core audience while ingratiating themselves with new ones. *Dredd*, arriving at the moment of maximum fatigue, does little of either. Giving very few damn about its chances as a franchise, and resisting the rush towards genre gentrification, it is an unsettling presence amid the massed ranks of acceptably different outsiders. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Andrew Macdonald  
Allon Reich  
Alex Garland

#### Producers for Rebellion

Jason Kingsley  
Chris Kingsley  
Screenplay by  
Alex Garland  
Created by John  
Wagner and  
Carlos Ezquerra

#### Director of Photography

Anthony Dod Mantle  
Editor

Mark Eckersey

#### Production Designer

Mark Digby  
Music

Paul Leonard-  
Morgan  
Sound Designer

Glen Freemantle

#### Costume Designer

Michael O'Connor  
Diana Cilliers

#### Production Companies

Lionsgate  
and Reliance  
Entertainment  
present in  
association with  
IM Global a DNA  
Films production

#### Executive Producers

Deepak Nayar  
Stuart Ford  
Adi Shankar

#### Cast

Karl Urban  
Judge Dredd  
Olivia Thirlby  
Judge Anderson  
Lena Headey

#### Ma-Ma Wood Harris

Kay  
Langley Kirkwood

#### Judge Lex Junior Singo

Amos  
Luke Tyler  
Freel  
Jason Cope  
Zwirner  
Dominhall Gleeson

#### clan techie Warwick Grier

Caleb

#### In Colour [2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

**In the aftermath of a nuclear war that has left much of the planet barren, the cities of the north-eastern USA are concentrated into Mega-City One, a polluted and crime-ridden slum. A semblance of order is maintained by the Judges, who police the city, pass sentence and mete out punishment. Judge Dredd, one of the most feared among them, is partnered with a trainee Judge, Cassandra Anderson, recruited because of her psychic powers, to decide whether she makes the grade.**

Their first assignment is a triple homicide at a giant accommodation block, Peach Trees, committed by the local gang, whose boss Ma-Ma plans to corner the market in the drug Slo-Mo. After Dredd and Anderson kill a number of low-level "perps" and take prisoner Kay, Ma-Ma shuts down the building – tricking the city authorities into thinking it's running a war drill – and tells its inhabitants that they will not be let out until the Judges are dead.

Anderson correctly intuits that Kay is responsible for the murders, but Dredd will not execute him without total certainty. They manage to evade Ma-Ma and kill her lieutenant, but during one fight Kay takes Anderson hostage. Meanwhile Ma-Ma summons four corrupt Judges to take on Dredd. Anderson escapes and helps Dredd see off his attackers.

They then confront Ma-Ma at the top of the building. Dredd throws her 200 storeys down.

Training day concluded, Dredd approves Anderson for active duty, but she hands in her resignation instead.

## Killing Them Softly

USA 2012

Director: Andrew Dominik

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Two eras of modern Americana come together in Aussie writer-director Andrew Dominik's adaptation of *Cogan's Trade*, a 1974 novel by George V. Higgins, admired chronicler of the Boston underworld's flexible morality and colourful lingua franca. Dominik sets its drama of small-time robbery and ruthless vengeance against the backdrop of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, Dubya's twilight months and the coming of "Yes we can". The constant voices of George W. Bush and Barack Obama on television and radio tell us it's election year 2008, yet the big old gas-guzzling automobiles suggest the mid-1970s – as indeed does the camerawork's tenebrous melancholy, very much in the school of Francis Coppola's famed

lensman Gordon 'The Prince of Darkness' Willis. The joins can't help but be rather obvious, so we can only assume we're being asked to make connections, and during a key heist sequence Dominik's helpful sound mix purposely foregrounds a media commentator insisting "the key issue here is the distribution of wealth". Not just a crime flick then, but a crime flick with ideological intent.

Drawing caustic comparisons between gangsterism and what one might term 'The American Way' isn't exactly a fresh move, since those thoughts are certainly upfront in the likes of Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990) and Scorsese's *Casino* (1995). But while those films had more generalised things to say about the land of the free, Dominik's conceit is much more specific, suggesting that the financial travails of 2008 and afterwards have opened up a fissure in the idea of community, revealing it to be a facade that masks a system run on pitiless

self-interest and greed. The bullet-riddled world of organised crime is no mere discrete enclave within the wider body politic, but a disturbing microcosm of the whole.

It's healthy to encounter such provocations in mainstream narrative American cinema, no doubt, but the question of whether it's possible to use an otherwise fairly straightforward genre piece as a delivery method refuses to go away. How effective can the political message be, conveyed as it is through an ever-present media barrage as the action unfolds, rather than blended within it?

Filter out the background noise of electioneering and you have a rather choice crime pic which capitalises well on Higgins's particular dialogue-led sensibility. Higgins's method is to let the denizens of his criminal demi-monde meet and greet while the reader tries to figure out the plot like some pattern in the verbal carpet. Action tends to be implied through talk rather than chronicled



Shotgun stories: Brad Pitt plays an enforcer employed by the mob in Andrew Dominik's recession-themed crime drama 'Killing Them Softly'

in detail, which might explain why this is only the second of his books to be filmed. It's almost four decades since Peter Yates's spot-on 1973 adaptation of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (a tale of a veteran offender who tries to evade jail by making a clandestine deal with the cops) brought us one of Robert Mitchum's great late performances.

In both films, the characters' pointed exchanges are central: everyone's trying to play it cool while sharing a common understanding that wrong moves can and will be fatal. Yes, *Killing Them Softly* has sawn-off shotguns, a heist, illicit gambling and summary executions, but Dominik has grasped that the real issue in this world is that whatever anyone says, they all know there are no second chances.

One look at Scoot McNairy's Frankie, a weaselly ex-con keen to get in on whatever job a crooked dry cleaner has in the offing, and we pretty much know he's doomed. With regard to "the distribution of wealth", he's tried to play it straight but struggled to find work in a depressed economy. After he knocks over a poker game with addled cohort Russell (a deliciously greasy Ben Mendelsohn), tension mounts as Brad Pitt's Jackie Cogan is hired by unseen criminals higher up to tie up any loose ends.

Frankie is the audience's point of entry: a guy who just wants a shortcut to a better car, a better hairdo and more sex. But it's Pitt's amiable assassin Cogan who's most memorable – he kills to order but prefers not to eliminate people he knows. It gets "touchy-feely" he says; the emotions prove too bothersome. Rather than get up close and personal, he prefers to pick his targets off long range: "killing them softly", as he puts it.

Pitt's limitations as an actor are only too evident when he steps outside his comfort zone, as in *Babel* (2006) or *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008). But he was notably effective as Jesse James, whose fearsome legend precedes him in Dominik's 2007 western *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. As Cogan, the film's producer-star flits from superficially personable bonhomie to dead-eyed murderous efficiency with silken facility.

His performance alone is enough to make Dominik's thematic point about the disconnect between the political class's smiling affirmations of community and the cold self-interest of the economic combine it represents. But still the film persists with Democrat and Republican claim and counter-claim about the financial-market carnage of autumn 2008, spilling out from car radios and bar-room TVs. Dominik deployed such contrapunctal narration to useful effect in *Jesse James*, where snippets of an after-the-fact biography are inserted alongside the way-it-really-was story unfolding before our eyes, and clearly thought he'd give it another go here. It's certainly justified thematically, but the injections of Obama-speak do sit awkwardly with cinematographer Greig Fraser's distinctly 1970s visuals – vintage autos prowling through the night, headlights flaring in motel forecourts.

Dominik's film is certainly no pristine retro artefact. For that he'd have had to follow Peter Yates's example and kept the direction studiously reserved. Instead he contrasts the beautifully weighted dialogue scenes with more flamboyant action set-pieces, notably



Small-time crooks Frankie (Scoot McNairy) and Russell (Ben Mendelsohn) knock over a poker game

a slow-mo symphony of breaking glass and spurting blood as one driver meets his end at a traffic crossing, accompanied by Ketty Lester's strings-drenched 1962 ballad 'Love Letters'.

This is just one of a series of purposefully ironic song choices, including 1930s ditties 'Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries' and 'It's Only a Paper Moon' – the latter perhaps a nod to Peter Bogdanovich's Great Depression movie *Paper Moon* (1973), itself perhaps an oblique comment on the Richard Nixon administration. While these unexpected musical moments cause a frisson, they seem overeager and overemphatic given that Dominik's material

*Dominik contrasts beautifully weighted dialogue scenes with action set-pieces, notably a slow-mo symphony of breaking glass and spurting blood*

is strong enough to speak for itself. So much here is note-perfect that it becomes intrusive when Dominik does push too hard.

Why over-gild the lily? An encounter between Pitt's hitman and his seemingly respectable employer, a besuited mob functionary (expertly played by Richard Jenkins), is illuminating. At first the money man doesn't grasp why they have to kill someone who is not responsible for the poker heist, even though the local community believes the person did the job. Then he gets it – it's all about restoring trust in the lucrative gambling den: "Ah, I see: the *public*." Innocence and guilt are secondary considerations to public perception and consumer confidence. In the same spirit, perhaps it's important for a director to be seen to be directing?

Dominik certainly leaves his mark. *Killing Them Softly* is a striking film of starkly delineated personality, yet it falls just shy of greatness by seemingly never quite knowing when to ease up. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Brad Pitt  
Dede Gardner  
Steve Schwartz  
Paula Mae Schwartz  
Anthony Katagas  
**Written for the Screen by**  
Andrew Dominik  
Based on the novel  
*Cogan's Trade* by George V. Higgins  
**Director of Photography**  
Greig Fraser  
**Editor**  
Brian A. Kates  
**Production Designer**  
Patricia Norris  
**Piano Pieces/ Musical Ambiences**  
Marc Streitenfeld  
**Sound Mixer**  
Kirk Francis  
**Costume Designer**  
Patricia Norris  
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### Production Companies

A TWB presentation  
An Inferno presentation  
In association with Annapurna Pictures and 1984 Private Defense Contractors  
A Plan B Entertainment production  
A Chockstone Pictures production  
**Executive Producers**  
Megan Ellison  
Matt Butan  
Bill Johnson  
Jim Seibel  
Adi Shankar  
Spencer Silna

### Richard Jenkins

driver  
James Gandolfini  
Mickey  
Ray Liotta  
Markie Trattman  
Vincent Curatola  
Johnny Amato  
**Slaine**  
Kenny Gill  
Max Casella  
Barry Caprio  
Trevor Long  
Steve Caprio  
Sam Shepard  
Dillon

Dolby Digital/DTS  
Colour by  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

### Cast

Brad Pitt  
Jackie Cogan  
Scoot McNairy  
Frankie  
Ben Mendelsohn  
Russell

**An American city, 2008.** Small-time crook Johnny Amato hires ex-con Frankie to rob an illegal card game hosted by Markie Trattman – since Markie has previously robbed his own game, suspicion will immediately fall on him again. Frankie persuades a reluctant Johnny to let him take fellow hustler Russell along to help him. Frankie and Russell pull it off but a mob fixer hires hitman Jackie Cogan to eliminate the perpetrators of the robbery and restore confidence.

After Russell is busted for drugs, Cogan learns the truth about the robbery because Russell has bragged about it to a friend, Kenny. Cogan persuades the fixer that Markie, Frankie and Johnny must be eliminated to get the game circuit back on track. Cogan also suggests bringing in fellow assassin 'New York' Mickey to share the hits, only for the latter to prove a drunken liability.

Cogan has to take over, calmly shooting Markie in his car, then suggesting to Frankie that he can win a reprieve by coming along on the Johnny hit. Frankie has no choice but to agree, but after seeing Cogan shoot Johnny, he's later killed when Cogan catches him unawares. Cogan meets the mob fixer for payment on the night of Obama's election, but is aggrieved to receive less than expected. "America is a business," he hisses, "So pay me."



The story of O: O, aka Ophelia (Blake Lively, centre), narrates the drug-dealing exploits of Chon (Taylor Kitsch, left) and Ben (Aaron Johnson, right)

## Savages

USA 2012

Director: Oliver Stone  
Certificate 15 129m 44s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Savages*, Oliver Stone's cartel-wars sex drama, was greeted in the US by humouring, occasionally condescending and frequently baffled reviews. Fashion favours adolescent fantasy treated with solemn sententiousness, you see, not serious matters treated with balls and brio, so audiences consequently missed a movie with real pulpy pulse.

The 19th film by its now 65-year-old director, *Savages* is of a piece with the nothing-succeeds-like-excess rule of Stone's career, a recklessly alive movie with retina-burning, sunstroke cinematography by sometime Tony Scott DP Daniel Mindel. It begins on the narration of Blake Lively's O – short for Ophelia, and named, as she tells us, after "the bipolar basketcase in *Hamlet* who committed suicide". She's a slumming rich chick, the shared girlfriend of aristocratic pot dealers Ben and Chon (played respectively by Aaron Johnson and Taylor Kitsch), prone to musing on the yin-yang attributes of her two lovers: "Chon fucks and Ben makes love... Chon is

earth and Ben spirit... Together they make one complete man..." Twaddle like that.

Is O's voiceover, largely taken verbatim from the source novel by crime-fiction writer Don Winslow, banal dialogue, a parody of banal dialogue, or just a fairly accurate representation of how a sybaritic sun-worshipper with a THC-soaked brain might process the world around her? Whatever the case, the film isn't blinkered by its narrator's perspective, as in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*'s 'this is how a child sees' set-up, a cop-out excusing the movie's callowness. O's selectively omniscient, occasionally unreliable perspective is one destabilising element in a narrative full of self-imposed obstacles, shaking up what might otherwise be another action pic of flexing masculine brinksmanship.

Ben, Chon and O's ménage à trois isn't just a narrative expedient to provide the partners an emotional stake in recovering O when she is kidnapped by a Mexican cartel. Played as it is with viable emotion, it removes the buddy movie from the comfort zone, instead

creating something that's as tangled as the intertwined limbs in a MMF threesome scene that strays close to overt bisexual group-grope.

It's a provocation towards audiences who, while accustomed to the cavalier ultra-violence of a Christopher Nolan, still get all squirmly when there's the faintest implication of 'gay shit'. Likewise, making the ruthless cartel big a woman, and a mother to boot, instead of the usual cigar-chomping Mexican character actor, introduces an element of the uncanny – Salma Hayek's Elena is a woman who's squeezed herself dry o' the milk of human kindness to perform her role. (Trojan Horsing gender-role confusion into the multiplex, Stone is working along parallel lines with Steven Soderbergh's magnificent double-bill of *Haywire* and *Magic Mike*.)

Stone is no stranger to breaking up genre material with psychosexual static, whether forefronting Tony Montana's incestuous motivations in his screenplay for 1983's immortally of-its-moment *Scarface*, or highlighting the homosexual



Right: 'La Reina' Elena (Salma Hayek)

underpinnings of martial culture in *Alexander* (2004) rather than making it glaringly implicit, as *300* did. The Colin Farrell/Jared Leto film collapsed under its own weight, a casualty of Stone's tendency to be a profligately additive, rather than subtractive, filmmaker, but *Savages*, for all its goings-on, is a remarkably cohesive and designed work. Spelling out the dichotomy between her lovers, O's narration establishes the film's dialectical design. It's a movie buttressed by oppositions, perceived and actual: the counterpoising of US privilege and Mexican aspiration, fair play and double-dealing, conciliation and all-out war. The title is twice spoken aloud: "You're talking to Taliban," Chon tells Ben when the latter wants to negotiate O's release from Elena. "Savages don't make deals." And when Elena's enforcer Lado, a mulleted Mephistopheles played by Benicio Del Toro, comes to understand the true erotic nature of the relationship between O, Ben and Chon, he responds with a muttered "Savages".

From Chon, "savage" refers to the developing world's ruthlessness – Lado prefaches a meeting with Chon and Ben by sending them internet video of some uncooperative parties' severed heads (shades of Daniel Pearl). From Lado, "savage" is synonymous with first-world decadence. But by their story's end, the competitors have moved so close to one another as to be indistinguishable, a parody of the NAFTA ideal of a level playing field. "My boys took a page from Elena's playbook," O's voiceover boasts when Ben and Chon kidnap Elena's daughter Magda (Sandra Echeverría), who's attending a California college and taking pains to social-climb far from the family business. Here Stone's sense of irony surpasses his narrator's, for Magda is introduced, in an inspired contrivance, obliviously standing next to O at a shopping-mall checkout counter shortly before the latter is taken – a coincidence that concretes the sense that these poor little rich girls are sisters, as everyone in the film seems to have their across-the-border opposite number. The premise of *Savages* is that the United States and Mexico do not so much contrast as reflect one another, with those on each side perceiving the reflection as grotesque, as in a funhouse mirror.

*Savages*, like much of Stone's cinema, relies on triangular relationships and binary contrasts of character – one thinks of father figures such as Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe in *Platoon* (1986), or Martin Sheen's noble blue-collar union man and Michael Douglas's Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (1987). Ben and Chon are two variants on exported American save-the-world interventionism, of whom Boomer presidents Clinton and G.W. Bush represent Left and Right variants, and of which Boomer Stone is the chronicler. Ben is the idealist stoner who travels the third world, investing his pot profits into humanitarian initiatives, a Buddhist concerned with sowing good karma, Chon the veteran of wars for freedom who's come back steeped in death to assure his friend, "You don't change the world, it changes you."

All of this would be rather schematic were it not for Stone's interest in how readymade notions of good and bad are complicated by an impossibly complicated world. Good guy Ben, for example, is as worthless as tits on a bull when the time for negotiation is over, and his initiation into by-any-means-necessary

## From Chon, "savage" refers to the developing world's ruthlessness. From Lado, "savage" is synonymous with first-world decadence

runs through the film. *Savages* is one of those increasingly rare movies that actually take note of the moral attrition accompanying an act of violence – as per the tagline to *Platoon*, "The first casualty of war is innocence." At one point Ben and Chon's attempts to sabotage Elena's cartel lead to the framing of one of her trusted advisers, whose interrogation they are invited to witness and participate in – old hat for Chon, but Ben is more accustomed to surfing than waterboarding, and here one gets a vivid sense of torture as a performance that degrades both victim and perpetrator.

Lado, Chon's Mexican other half, is introduced with an ingenious flourish. The killer's front is a landscaping operation that functions as a smokescreen for his hits. He strolls into the assigned house like a door-to-door salesman, and while he has words with the problem party – frequently the last words they'll hear, as in an early scene which has him leaning on a mark played by the unredoubtable Shea Whigham – his men surround the building, blocking out potential screams and gunshots in a racket of leaf blowers and hedge trimmers. It's like one of those villain's signatures that would be devised for spaghetti westerns – and Adam Peters's score draws heavily on Morricone's precedent – but rather than existing solely to be 'cool', this violent gimmickry touches elements of class, race and national resentment at large in Stone's film, making the very invisibility of the immigrant shit-workers an element of surprise. Like *Savages* itself, it's a wily sneak attack designed to bushwhack the complacent. ☀



Mexican enforcer Lado (Benicio Del Toro) faces Californian pot-grower Ben (Aaron Johnson)

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Moritz Borman  
Eric Kopeloff  
**Screenplay**  
Shane Salerno  
Don Winslow  
Oliver Stone  
Based on the novel  
by Don Winslow  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Dan Mindel  
**Edited by**  
Joe Hutshing

#### Stuart Levy Alex Marquez

**Production Designer**  
Tomás Voth  
**Music**  
Adam Peters  
**Production  
Sound Mixer**  
Tod Maitland  
**Costume Designer**  
Cindy Evans  
©Universal Studios  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Universal Pictures  
presents in  
association with  
Relativity Media  
a Moritz Borman  
production  
An Oliver Stone film  
**Executive Producers**  
Fernando Sulichin  
Shane Salerno  
Todd Arnow

**Cast**  
Taylor Kitsch  
Chon  
Blake Lively  
O  
**Aaron Johnson**  
Ben  
John Travolta  
Dennis  
**Benicio Del Toro**  
Lado  
**Salma Hayek**  
Elena  
Jana Banker

volleyball girl  
**Candice Bergen**  
grow house girl  
**Patrick Fourny**  
marijuana distributor  
**Gary Stretch**  
badass biker  
**Diego Cataño**  
Esteban

DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]  
**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International UK & Eire  
11,676 ft + 0 frames  
**Dolby Digital/**  
Datasat Digital  
Sound/SDDS  
Colour by

**Laguna Beach, California, the present.** Ben and Chon run a lucrative business selling high-grade pot. Ben is the botanist, cultivating the marijuana seeds that former Navy SEAL Chon brought back from one of his tours of duty in Afghanistan, where he gained the skills that make him the enterprise's effective enforcer. In addition to sharing the business, Ben and Chon also share a girlfriend, O (for Ophelia). They refuse a partnership offered by a Mexican cartel. In response, the cartel kidnaps O. In order to keep her alive, Ben and Chon are forced into a servile relationship by the cartel's head, 'La Reina' Elena, who pulls the strings from Mexico's Baja peninsula while commanding an enforcer of her own, the brutal and resourceful Lado.

After extracting information from Dennis, their inside man at the DEA, Ben and Chon begin a covert plan to

undermine the Baja cartel while outwardly following Elena's orders. Ben and Chon steal the cartel's money to use as ransom, and frame high-ranking members of the organisation for their acts. Meanwhile Lado begins to align his interests with his boss's chief competitor, 'El Azul'. Ben and Chon's programme of sabotage leads them to discover Lado's contact with El Azul; they also discover that Elena has a precious daughter, Magda, living in the US. Seeing that Magda can be exchanged for O, Ben and Chon kidnap her. The swap meeting with Elena and Lado appears to end in a hail of bullets – but in fact this is just narrator O's pessimistic fancy. In reality, Dennis and his officers arrive at the meeting, lock up Elena and Lado and set Ben, Chon and O free as informants, leaving them to an early retirement in Indonesia, still haunted by their experiences.

## Anna Karenina

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Joe Wright

Certificate 12A 129m 59s

### Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Joe Wright's version of *Anna Karenina* is nothing if not bold. Presumably wary of making yet another tasteful British costume drama (albeit adapted from a classic Russian novel), his approach is stylised and self-conscious in the extreme. Eschewing conventional realism, he tells the story as if all the protagonists are characters in a play. For all its opulence, the film is almost entirely studio-bound, using models, miniatures and music boxes. Racecourses and railway stations alike are recreated in a deliberately artificial way and sequences such as a dance at a ball and a picnic in the countryside are edited as you'd expect in a musical.

At first this strategy seems misjudged: a cross between a lesser Fellini movie and a traditional literary adaptation. We pay more attention to its makers' technical ingenuity than to the story they are ostensibly telling. The swirling music doesn't help. Nor (at least at first) does Seamus McGarvey's extravagant camerawork. However, as the showy effects gradually diminish, the characters come to the fore.

*Anna Karenina* has been filmed many, many times before, with stars such as Greta Garbo (1935) and Vivien Leigh (1948) playing the adulterous heroine. Few adaptations have been especially satisfactory, running up against the bleakness of Tolstoy's novel. For all its opulent trappings, this is a study of family breakdown, despair and, finally, of suicide. Despite its initial flirtation with high kitsch, Wright's is one of the strongest versions. What makes it work is not the showy effects but the intelligence and intensity of the performances.

Tom Stoppard's script pays attention to the relationship between Levin and Kitty as well as that between Vronsky and Anna (other film adaptations tend to cut this strand), maintaining a social context beyond its story of doomed love. We're made aware that the aristocratic class to which Anna belongs is in its last throes. Revolution is only a few decades away. In one early scene at the train station, we see a tarred worker emerging from the smoke. Anna looks at him as if he's a strange creature from some subterranean world. The decadence of the Moscow aristocracy is contrasted with the simpler life Levin leads on the land. Kitty (played by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, the adulterous queen in *A Royal Affair*) has a pragmatism that Anna lacks.

This film is Keira Knightley's third with Joe Wright after *Atonement* (2007) and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and her role as Anna is by far the most daunting. She excels in it. Her early poise and self-satisfaction, when advising Dolly on how to save her marriage and showing off at the ball, give way to desperation. As Anna loses her family and her position in society, Knightley is able to convey both ferocity and vulnerability.

Anna is not portrayed simply as the victim of a patriarchal and hypocritical society. Her cruelty to Karenin is also shown. She is wilful, headstrong and self-destructive. Wright delights in showing her growing disgust with her husband whose mannerisms she can't bear. Aaron Johnson as Count Vronsky is more of a cipher: a dashing cavalryman in



Unhappy families: Keira Knightley

white uniform who at times seems to be a projection of Anna's own romantic fantasy.

Jude Law is relatively sympathetic as Karenin, portraying him as a kind but distracted man, so obsessed with his political career that he is slow to notice his wife is having an affair under his nose. He is baffled by Anna's mounting antipathy toward him.

The character actors help anchor the film, even at its most showy and self-conscious. As Dolly, Kelly Macdonald's pathos owes nothing to the flashy camerawork while Matthew Macfadyen brings bluster and bonhomie to the role of her philandering husband Oblonsky.

Wright's *Anna Karenina* is certainly disarming. In heightening the artifice and laying bare the device, he may be intending to expose the hollowness in the aristocratic society he is depicting. He also risks alienating his audience. One of the traditional pleasures of costume drama is losing yourself in an era recreated in loving detail. Here, the abrupt editing and constant emphasis on role-playing ensure that the audience is always aware of the mechanics behind the storytelling. It's a testament to the strength of the performances and of Wright's staging that the film retains its emotional urgency. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Paul Webster

#### Screenplay

Tom Stoppard  
Based on the novel  
by Leo Tolstoy

#### Director of

Photography  
Seamus McGarvey

#### Editor

Melanie Ann Oliver

#### Production Designer

Sarah Greenwood

#### Music

Dario Marianelli

#### Production

Sound Mixer

John Casali

#### Costume Designer

Jacqueline Durran

©Focus Features LLC

#### Production

Companies

Focus Features

presents a Working

Title production  
A Joe Wright film  
Executive Producer  
Liza Chasin

#### Cast

Keira Knightley  
Anna Karenina

Jude Law  
Karenin

Aaron Taylor-

Johnson  
Vronsky

Kelly Macdonald

Dolly

Matthew Macfadyen

Oblonsky

Dormall Gleeson

Levin

Ruth Wilson

Princess Betsy

Tverskoy

Alicia Vikander

Kitty

Olivia Williams

Countess Vronsky

Emily Watson  
Countess Lydia  
Ivanovna

Tannishtha  
Chatterjee

Masha

Michelle Dockery

Princess Myagkaya

Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

Sound

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures  
International

UK & Ire

11,698 ft +8 frames

**Russia, the 1870s.** Anna Karenina comes to Moscow to visit Dolly, who is married to Anna's brother Oblonsky. Oblonsky has been cheating on his wife but Anna is successful in encouraging Dolly to keep her marriage together. Dolly's younger sister Kitty is in a state of great excitement about a ball where she hopes young cavalry officer Count Vronsky will propose to her. She has already rebuffed the attentions of Konstantin Levin, a kind-hearted landowner. At the ball, Kitty is shocked to find that Vronsky is more interested in Anna. Vronsky and Anna eventually become lovers. Anna's husband Karenin, an important politician, is oblivious to their affair until gossip reaches him and he sees heranguished reaction to Vronsky's fall during a horse race. Anna wants to leave Karenin but is terrified of being separated from her young son. When she falls ill and comes close to death, Karenin forgives her. But she recovers and continues her affair with Vronsky. She goes to live with him, with the result that she is ostracised socially. Worried that Vronsky is unfaithful, Anna grows increasingly unstable and finally commits suicide by throwing herself under a train. Meanwhile Konstantin has married Kitty and they have a child.

## Big Boys Gone Bananas!\*

Sweden 2012

Director: Fredrik Gertten

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Scanning the website of the PR firm Gibraltar Associates, which apparently has been taken on by the food giant Dole to help discredit his documentary film *Big Boys Gone Bananas!\**, Swedish filmmaker Fredrik Gertten notices and highlights a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche: "It is easier to cope with a bad conscience than a bad reputation." The friendly sky-blue font might somewhat mask the rank sinisterness of the message were we not already well into an Orwellian saga that attempts to expose Dole and its various teams as being no less ethically flexible than Nietzsche would advise.

Inspirational quotes-of-the-day doubtless help to spur a person on as he or she is drawing down the full might of a corporate behemoth that makes \$7 billion a year on a tiny Swedish film. Gertten's 2009 documentary *Bananas!\** observed the efforts of flamboyant personal-injury lawyer Juan Dominguez to obtain redress for banana workers who claimed to have been rendered sterile by exposure to dangerous pesticides while working for Dole. Though Dole deployed both barrels in attempting to prevent Gertten's film from being screened, Gertten continues to fight and appears to create – at least in Sweden – a political *cause célèbre*.

Since Dole's actions reek pretty unambiguously (their representatives persistently admit to not having seen the film they're striving to quash), this documentary functions best as a primer or reminder for any naive soul who might be tempted to entertain the possibility that major corporations aren't occasionally averse to a degree of lying, cheating and stealing. It also emphasises the importance of responsible reporting in an era of increasingly persuasive PR; and it highlights the significant cultural divide that saw Dole critically misread the importance of free speech to Swedish politicians. It provides an interesting insight too into the politics of film festivals and their vulnerability in the face of any threat to their funding. (The Los Angeles Film Festival comes off poorly as it attempts a compromise in the face of a legal threat – its organisers screen the film but only with a preceding disclaimer.)

Will Gertten's efforts make much long-term difference to one of the biggest food producers in the world? Undoubtedly not;



Food for thought: 'Big Boys Gone Bananas!\*

even the whole of Sweden is small bananas to a company operational in 90 countries. Like many campaigning films, this one also suffers from a preaching-to-the-converted problem; it's unashamedly subjective and, critically, doesn't explain in enough detail the ins and outs of the legal case around Juan Dominguez, fast-forwarding the facts on the assumption that we're already on the 'right' side. Still, as a rundown of the sort of self-preservation tactics commonplace at the top of the corporate tree, and their radiating influence into culture and politics alike, it's salutary, chilling and provocative.

The 'bad conscience' quote, incidentally, is gone from Gibraltar Associates' website. In its place, Gibraltar's senior vice president John Procter – formerly press officer for the war and reconstruction in Iraq – exhorts us: "Everyone has an interesting story to tell. PR's about connecting with the people that actually care to listen." 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Margarete Jangård  
**Camera**  
 Frank Pineda  
 Gabriel Noguez  
 Jason Wawro  
 Joakim Demmer  
 Joseph Aguirre  
 Kiki Algeier  
 Malin Korkesalo  
 Sasha Snow  
 Stefan Berg  
 Anna Sivertsson  
 Basia Winograd  
 Christian Sparkes  
 Desh Ferando  
 Devin Doyle  
 Doug Grizmacher  
 Einar Árnason  
 Emma Svensson  
 Terese Mörnvik  
 Tobias Lilja  
 Tomas Kurkinas

#### Editor

Jesper Osmund  
 Benjamin Binderup  
**Composers**  
 Conny Malmqvist  
 Dan 'Gisen' Malmquist  
**Sound Design**  
 Alexander Thörqvist  
 ©WG Film AB,  
 SVT, Film i Skåne  
**Production Companies**  
 WG Film presents in co-production with SVT, Film i Skåne with support from The Swedish Film Institute

#### Executive Producer

Fredrik Gertten

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Dogwoof

**Malmo, Sweden, 2009.** Filmmaker Fredrik Gertten prepares to launch his documentary 'Bananas!', which covers a long-running court case between the Dole food company and Nicaraguan workers claiming to have suffered health and fertility problems following exposure to unsafe pesticides. Dole has admitted some liability but is apparently still seeking to discredit the workers' lawyer, Juan Dominguez. Just prior to his film's world premiere at the 2009 Los Angeles Film Festival, Gertten receives a 200-page cease-and-desist letter from Dole's lawyers; all the festival sponsors receive the same material. The festival pulls the film from competition, and agrees to screen it only with a disclaimer disputing its credibility. Enlisting the powerful PR firm Gibraltar Associates, Dole lobbies journalists to run negative stories on the film (which the company's representatives still have not seen). Gertten's producer Magarethe Jangård is also sued. A Swedish blogger familiar with the case successfully encourages local fast-food chain Max to boycott Dole, and Swedish MPs become interested in the case. Gertten and Jangård screen their film at the parliament in Stockholm, and receive cross-party backing. Swedish supermarkets and grocers demand talks with Dole. Dole drops the lawsuit but, as there has been no ruling, Gertten still cannot be insured to screen his film in the US. He continues to battle for a dismissal, and finally wins. Dole is ordered to pay him \$200,000. Juan Dominguez, meanwhile, is cleared of any wrongdoing. Gertten screens his film for banana workers in Nicaragua.

## The Bourne Legacy

USA 2012

Director: Tony Gilroy

Certificate 12A 134m 55s

### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The protagonists of the Bourne movies, whatever their names, are assets, not agents, manipulated by jargon-spitting suits from monitor-filled control centres. Tony Gilroy co-wrote the first and third films, and now directs the fourth after a long hiatus during which the frenetic style used by Paul Greengrass in *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *Ultimatum* (2007) became a cliché. The action of *Legacy* overlaps with that of the last film but Gilroy approaches it quite differently, combining long-fuse, character-based suspense with more familiar pleasures. At the end of *Ultimatum*, Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) and Pamela Landy (Joan Allen) brought into the light what were meant to be black ops; *Legacy* begins with new suit Eric Byer (Edward Norton) "burning to the ground" every secret programme that might be tainted. Two targets get away: genetically enhanced Iraq veteran-turned-asset Aaron Cross (Jeremy Renner) and biochemist Marta Shearing (Rachel Weisz), servant of the military-industrial-pharmacological complex.

Bourne had to stay 'off the grid', evading modern communications and surveillance systems while manoeuvring through its densest points; Cross by contrast is introduced amid untameable nature, training in Alaska, though still observed from afar. An early shot pulls out from Renner, shivering by a freezing lake he's just crawled out of, to a massive subarctic landscape view, underscoring Cross's extreme isolation and also signalling that Gilroy and DP Robert Elswit, who previously collaborated on *Michael Clayton* (2007) and the underrated *Duplicity* (2009), have thrown out Greengrass's style manual. When Cross encounters another asset, unnamed but played by Oscar Isaac, the sense of isolation is barely reduced: neither can trust the other, and when Cross says (lies) that wolves, unusually, have been tracking him since his arrival, Isaac's character jokes that perhaps they don't think he's human – jokes or retorts, given the men's trade and the effects of the drugs that their employers feed them.

It emerges that, unlike Bourne, who experienced his CIA training as an affliction, Cross embraces his superhuman powers. To avoid being killed by a drone operated by his bosses he switches places with one of the wolves, as it were disavowing his humanity. This done, Gilroy flashes back to Cross's recruitment by Byer in Iraq four years earlier.

What we do, says Byer, is "morally indefensible but absolutely necessary". Cross decides to stay on his drug regime, not only for purposes of self-preservation but because his identity is bound up in the physical and mental capabilities they have given him. He later tells Shearing, while convincing her to 'viralise' the drug and make its effects on him permanent, that his recruiting officer had to overstate his IQ to make up his quota. Renner, from his first scene with Isaac, conveys a sadness that comes from doing whatever Byer has made him do, and from knowledge of its personal rather than martial necessity. Bourne had to discover his own guilt; Cross has long lived with it.

Weisz's character, on the other hand, like the corporate functionaries of *Michael*





The covert locker: Jeremy Renner

Clayton, is an adept enough dissembler to get by. Though she has met Cross during check-ups, in her work with assets she has refused (not unlike Isaac's character) to countenance the smallest of talk, and there are hints – such as her big empty house in the middle of nowhere – that she seeks isolation, or at least distance from the community of spooks in which she's immersed. When Cross confronts her after her own narrow escape from the CIA, a masterly suspense sequence that builds from a verbal confrontation between Weisz and an eerie Elizabeth Marvel, she barely offers an argument; and he, given his own culpability, doesn't press the point. The passage that follows, in which Cross and Shearing get out of the country while Byer's team piece together their movements from

satellite imagery and CCTV, though familiar, is as exciting as anything in the series so far; but afterwards Gilroy drops a few stitches.

The would-be climactic set piece in Manila, after Cross has been viralised, marks a reversion to the *Supremacy/Ultimatum* model, and is inferior to the chase sequences in the films it resembles. The *diabolus ex machina* that Gilroy offers up, 'Larx' (Louis Ozawa Changchien), doesn't live up to his billing as the ultimate killing machine, and there's a powerful sense that the nominal ending, with Cross and Shearing still at large, Byers still in pursuit of them and, perhaps most interestingly, US intelligence in complete disarray, has been deliberately left incomplete to allow for a sequel. The balance of the film merits one. S

## Cockneys vs Zombies

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Matthias Hoene  
Certificate 15 88m 20s

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

*Cockneys vs Zombies* opens with a multilayered locale in an uneasy state of flux. Behind a billboard depicting a future idyll of gentrified apartments ("Luxurious living in the heart of East London," reads a caption) we see a grim building site reminiscent of the bombed-out landscapes of the Second World War, while buried beneath is yet another stratum of apocalyptic history: a plague pit sealed by Charles II in 1666, now belching forth its undead residents into a present trying to turn its back on the past. Likewise Ray Macguire (Alan Ford), a onetime hero of WWII ("Alright, let's 'ave it!" he shouts in flashback, bloodily dispatching Nazis), is at risk of being moved on from his care home as his neglected old neighbourhood succumbs to modernisation.

Here, as in Keith Wright's recent *Harold's Going Stiff*, the elderly, once the backbone of their community, have themselves become a kind of living dead – a point vividly (and hilariously) illustrated when ancient, deaf-as-a-post Hamish (Richard Briers) hobbles along on his Zimmer frame at exactly the same ultra-slow pace as the zombies shuffling after him. Like their flesh-eating counterparts, this old guard will rise again – helped by a younger generation of East Enders, notably Ray's grandsons Terry (Rasmus Hardiker) and Andy (Harry Treadaway) and their cousin Katy (Michelle Ryan), all of whom are determined to carry on the district's legacy of defiance and prove that they too have "the Macguire genes".

"You can get anything you want as long as you work hard, stick together as a family and do what's right." This is the Macguires' increasingly unfashionable ethos, imparted (in flashback) to Terry and Andy, ironically enough, just moments before their shotgun-toting parents are mowed down by the police surrounding their home. Like their whole community of chancers and straight-out criminals, the Macguires have seemingly always been beleaguered, and always come out fighting. Shrugging off the zombies as just one more in a long series of impediments to urban contentment, Terry makes light of this latest catastrophe: "The East End's been through worse," he says. Likewise Matthias Hoene's film, a vibrant, affectionately self-mocking mash-up of zombie and gangster tropes (with some absurdly tortuous rhyming slang thrown in), presents serious issues of the here and now (the Tory abandonment of the nation's poor, unemployed and elderly; the callous detachment of bankers from reality), but responds with comedy, as a mode both reflecting and embodying the tenacious grin-and-bear-it spirit of the Blitz.

Hoene, who previously revamped Hammer with his 20-part serial *Beyond the Rave* (2008), here teams up with writers James Moran (*Severance*) and Lucas Roche (editor on *Beyond the Rave*) for a second dose of undead-versus-underclass. Perfectly setting the tone with the cartoon form of its opening credits, this is a broadly funny, leftist splatterfest in which the downtrodden prevail, Britain's wartime values of community are reawakened, and the past lives on to forge a future more caring and inclusive than what's currently being billed. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Frank Marshall  
Patrick Crowley  
Jeffrey M. Weiner

#### Screenplay

Tony Gilroy  
Dan Gilroy  
Story  
Tony Gilroy  
Inspired by the  
Bourne series created  
by Robert Ludlum  
Director of  
Photography  
Robert Elswit  
Edited by

#### Production Designer

Kevin Thompson

#### Music

James Newton  
Howard

#### Production

#### Sound Mixer

Kirk Francis

#### Costume Designer

Shay Cunliffe

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Chris O'Hara

©Universal Studios  
Production  
Companies

#### Universal Pictures

presents in  
association with

Relativity Media  
a Kennedy/  
Marshall production

in association  
with Captivate  
Entertainment

#### Executive Producers

Henry Morrison

Jennifer Fox

#### Cast

Jeremy Renner

Aaron Cross

#### Rachel Weisz

Dr Marta Shearing

#### Edward Norton

Retired Col. Eric  
Byer, USAF

#### Stacy Keach

Retired Adm. Mark  
Turso, USN

#### Dennis Boutsikaris

Terrence Ward

#### Oscar Isaac

Outcome #3

#### Joan Allen

Pam Landy

#### Albert Finney

Dr Albert Hirsch

#### David Strathairn

#### Noah Vosen

Scott Glenn  
Ezra Kramer

#### Donna Murphy

Dita Mandy  
Michael Chernus

#### Arthur Ingram

#### Louis Ozawa

#### Changchien

LARX #3

#### Zeljko Ivanek

Donald Fote

#### Elizabeth Marvel

Dr. Connie Dowd

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

#### Sound/SDDS

Colour by  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures  
International

UK & IRE

12,142 ft +8 frames

**The existence of the CIA's covert Blackbriar programme has been made public, and in response the National Research Assay Group mounts a clean-up operation, terminating all similar schemes by killing agents and auxiliary staff. While training in Alaska, Aaron Cross, a genetically enhanced 'Outcome' agent, narrowly avoids being killed by a drone strike ordered by NRAG chief Eric Byer. Meanwhile at the Maryland laboratories of Sterisyn-Morlanta, which supplies the agents with drugs to enhance their physical and intellectual powers, scientist Donald Fote appears to go berserk and shoots dead all of his senior colleagues except one, Dr Marta Shearing. Cross heads south to find Shearing, his supervisor since he joined the programme, in search of**

**drugs. He finds her at home just as she is about to be murdered by a CIA team. Having dispatched her attackers and burned the house down, Cross and Shearing go on the run. They discuss Cross's decision to keep taking his pills and Shearing accepts that without them they are both in danger; she agrees to 'viralise' the chemicals, making their effects permanent. Shearing and Cross fly to the company's laboratories in Manila and perform the operation. Byer, working from a control suite in Washington DC, discovers the couple's whereabouts and deploys Larx, an Outcome agent from Bangkok, to kill them. After an extended chase, Shearing kills Larx. She and Cross escape.**

## Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has to Travel

USA 2011  
Director: Lisa Immordino Vreeland  
Certificate PG 85m 57s



Beastenders: Michelle Ryan

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
James Harris  
Mark Lane  
Matthias Hoene  
**Written by**  
James Moran  
Lucas Roche  
**Director of Photography**  
Daniel Bronks  
**Editors**  
John Palmer  
Neil Farrell  
**Production Designer**  
Matthew Button  
**Original Music**  
Jody Jenkins  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ashok Kumar Kumar  
**Costume Designer**  
Matthew Price

©Bishop Rock Films Limited/Cockneys vs Zombies Limited  
**Production Companies**  
The Tea Shop &

Film Company in association with Limelight, Molinare, StudioCanal and Kinton Pictures present a film by Matthias Hoene  
**Executive Producers**  
Simon Crowe  
Matthew Joynes

**Cast**  
Rasmus Hardiker  
Terry MacGuire  
Harry Treadaway  
Andy MacGuire  
Michelle Ryan  
Katy MacGuire  
Georgia King  
Emma  
Jack Doolan  
Davey Tuppance  
Ashley Thomas  
Mental Mickey  
Richard Briers  
Hamish

**Honor Blackman**  
Peggy  
**Alan Ford**  
Ray McGuire  
**Tony Gardner**  
Clive  
**Dudley Sutton**  
Eric

#### In Colour

**Distributor**  
StudioCanal Limited  
**7,950 ft +0 frames**

**London's East End, the present. A proposed building development threatens the Bow Bells Care Home with closure. To secure the future of their grandfather Ray, a Bow Bells resident, brothers Terry and Andy Macguire attempt a bank robbery, helped by their cousin Katy, friend Davey and weapons man Mental Mickey. Meanwhile builders at the development site open a plague pit sealed by Charles II in 1666, unleashing zombies. Fleeing the bank with the building firm's money, and with bank manager Clive and client Emma as hostages, the five robbers find the East End overrun by zombies. Hiding out in a warehouse, Mickey is bitten on the arm and eventually turns into a zombie, before being killed with his own hand grenade. Armed with Mickey's shotgun, Clive tries to regain control of his captors, but is overcome by zombies after shooting Davey. Terry, Andy and Katy decide to rescue Ray and his fellow residents from the care home, with Emma now joining them. After rearming at Mickey's lock-up and commandeering a double-decker bus for transport, the robbers find the elderly residents holed up in the Bow Bells kitchen. Now all armed, they fight their way out to the bus, and when it breaks down near the Docks, transfer to a moored boat. Realising that the boat is still chained to a bollard, Ray leaps ashore to untie it, and mows down the surrounding zombies, with help from his three younger relatives. The survivors head downriver in the boat.**

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

As featured in her authoritative 1980 volume *Allure*, Diana Vreeland's dictum 'the eye has to travel' offers a concise summation of the late fashion iconoclast's visionary, trailblazing, two-fingers-up-to-banality spirit. A trace of that spirit can be felt in granddaughter-in-law Lisa Immordino Vreeland's effervescent, impeccably turned out documentary tribute, which follows its subject from youth in Belle Epoque Paris to esteem and notoriety as a revolutionary force at *Harper's Bazaar* and later *Vogue*, all the way up to her twilight years revitalisation of the Costume Institute at New York's Metropolitan Museum. Conceived as one part of a three-pronged multimedia celebration that includes a lavish coffee-table tome and a Venice exhibition, the film is, happily, a great deal more than the glossy, frothy tie-in this might suggest. Elegantly and inventively deploying its generous arsenal of researched images – evocative stills, movie clips, archive footage – in a manner that Vreeland might well approve of, it's an absorbing look at an indomitable, intensely modern personality.

Born in Paris in 1903 to socialite parents, Vreeland quickly became smitten with the city and its rapidly evolving fashions. Even after emigrating first to New York (on the outbreak of World War I), then later London (on marrying financier Reed Vreeland), she kept coming back, buying garments from friend Coco Chanel for her inaugural Berkeley Square boutique. ("The best thing about London is Paris," she said.) We learn that the young Diana fretted over her angular looks – "I was always my mother's ugly little monster" – but this sense of being a misfit was formative in her idiosyncratic championing of the unconventional and imperfect. Hired by *Harper's* in 1937, Vreeland quickly dropped collective jaws with her arch 'Why Don't You?' column, a dare-to-dream twist on the humdrum lifestyle tip ("Why don't you wash your blond child's hair in dead champagne, as they do in France?"). Although these were delivered with a knowing wink, Vreeland was deadly serious about promoting the role of fantasy and imagination in people's lives – "I think your imagination is your reality," she said. Pretty arresting sentiments in Depression-era New York: Vreeland's sons, as well as revealing that their upbringing was hardly stable, freely admit that their mother turned a blind eye to real-world hardship.

Vreeland was fond of using her made-up word 'faction' – fact and fiction merged – to describe her stylistic ethos: "Never worry about



Glove actually: Diana Vreeland

the facts. Just present an image to the public." When she became *Harper's* fashion editor (a post she held until 1962), her offbeat vision was fully unshackled. She commissioned eccentric photo-shoots in far-flung destinations such as Japan and Africa, often to the chagrin of the magazine's accountants. With her equally fearless collaborator, photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe, she endorsed daring new looks in modelling and advertising. Vreeland 'discovered' Lauren Bacall in the 1940s – the resulting photo-shoot found its way into the hands of Howard Hawks's then wife Slim (a fashion icon herself), who suggested Bacall try out for *To Have and Have Not* – and boosted the nascent careers of Twiggy and Mick Jagger. Photographers (David Bailey and Vreeland protégé Richard Avedon), designers (Manolo Blahnik, Hubert de Givenchy) and former models all remark that it was Vreeland's sheer originality that was singularly bracing, while Ali MacGraw fondly recalls a demanding stint as Vreeland's personal assistant.

The film avoids overdosing on talking heads by reconstructing Vreeland's expansive interviews with George Plimpton (for autobiography *D.V.*), Annette Miller doing a passable imitation of the gravelly voice. This works beautifully, set as it is to fluent, Bruce Weber-like pans and zooms across stills and magazine spreads; interestingly, Weber had previously aborted his own profile of Vreeland, the surviving footage ending up in his *Chop Suey* (2001). We see Vreeland lampooned – in William Klein's *Who Are You, Polly Magoo?* (1966) and Stanley Donen's *Funny Face* (1957) – but this just adds to the sense of a figure seemingly attached to almost every pop 'happening' of the 20th century. As the soundtrack dispenses Vreeland's often cryptic, sometimes befuddling aphorisms, the film's strength is to portray her as a relentlessly enquiring mind, with a complex conception of style and elegance: "It's a way of life. And I'm not talking about a lot of clothes." 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Lisa Immordino Vreeland

**Written by**

Lisa Immordino Vreeland

Bent-Jorgen Perlmutt

Frederic Tcheng

**Director of Photography**

Cristobal Zanartu

**Editors**

Bent-Jorgen Perlmutt

#### Executive Producers

Raja Sethuraman

Magnus Andersson

Jonathan Gray

**In Colour**

**Distributor**

StudioCanal Limited

**7,735 ft +8 frames**

**A documentary about pioneering fashion editor Diana Vreeland (1903-1989). The film follows Vreeland from her early life in Paris to her trailblazing reign as fashion editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and later editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, and her influential latter-day tenure as consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. Archive material and still photographs accompany contributions from family members, contemporaries and acolytes, alongside reconstructions of George Plimpton's expansive interviews with Vreeland.**

## Diary of a Wimpy Kid

### Dog Days

USA 2012  
Director: David Bowers, Certificate U 93m 50s

#### Reviewed by Anna Smith

Mischiefous children learn life lessons in this third in the series based on Jeff Kinney's books. As ever, 'wimpy' hero Greg doesn't set out to deceive his parents but ends up resorting to lies in an attempt to keep everyone happy. This time, his tall tale concerns a summer job he's supposedly been offered at the local country club – something his busy parents seem to accept a little too readily, but which helps maintain dramatic tension in this otherwise light episodic comedy.

Much of the narrative revolves around set pieces intended to strike a chord with averagely naughty kid. Greg and friend Rowley disobey orders and go on a fairground ride with predictably punishing consequences; Greg sneaks into the country club and loses his swimming trunks in the pool, forced into a farcical scenario that ends with him sporting women's clothing. It's fairly routine comedy but done with a warm heart, a cynical joke always on hand to balance out the script's more sentimental moments. Director David Bowers (*Flushed Away*) has equalled his work on 2011's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules*, though given the increasing familiarity of the format and the advancing ages of the actors, this seems like a fitting conclusion to Greg's big-screen adventures. ☺

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Produced by

Nina Jacobson  
Brad Simpson  
**Screenplay**  
Maya Forbes  
Wallace Wolodarsky  
Based upon the book by Jeff Kinney

##### Director of Photography

Anthony B. Richmond

##### Film Editor

Troy Takaki  
**Production Designer**  
Brent Thomas

##### Music

Edward Shearmur

##### Production Sound Mixer

Darren Brisker

##### Costume Designer

Monique Prudhomme  
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##### Korea and Spain)

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##### Production Companies

Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Color Force production Made in association with Dune Entertainment

##### Executive Producers

Jeff Kinney  
Jeremiah Samuels

##### Cast

Zachary Gordon  
Greg Heffley  
**Steve Zahn**  
Frank Heffley  
**Robert Capron**  
Rowley Jefferson

##### Devon Bostick

Rodrick Heffley  
**Rachael Harris**  
Susan Heffley

##### Peyton List

Holly Hills  
**Grayson Russell**

##### Fregley

##### Karan Brar

##### Chirag

##### Laine Macneil

##### Patty Farrell

##### Connor Fielding

##### Owen Fielding

##### Manny Heffley

##### Melissa Roxburgh

##### Heather Hills

##### Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS

##### Colour by

##### DeLuxe

##### Release prints by

##### Fujifilm

##### [2.35:1]

##### Distributor

20th Century Fox International (UK)

##### 8,445 ft +0 frames

**US, the present. Schoolboy Greg Heffley is looking forward to spending the summer holidays playing computer games but his father is determined to get him out of the house. After visiting the local country club with his friend Rowley, Greg tells his father that he has obtained a job there, and proceeds to visit daily to keep up the pretence. Greg's father buys the family a dog. Greg gets into trouble with Rowley's parents while on holiday and then with his own father, who discovers his lie about the job. Greg arranges a gig at a 'Sweet 16' party for his brother Rodrick's band; this ends disastrously and embarrasses the birthday girl, though it brings Greg closer to the girl's younger sister Holly, the object of his affections. Greg and his father make up.**

## The Expendables 2

USA 2012  
Director: Simon West  
Certificate 15 102m 32s

#### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Whatever else one might say about it, *The Expendables 2*, swimming against the euphemistic and be-colonised tide, is at least honestly and concisely labelled as a sequel. On the other hand, given the series's lineage in the Cannon and Carolco corpora of the 1980s, an amusing or confusing subtitle, along the lines of *First Blood Part II* or *Missing in Action 2: The Beginning*, would not have gone amiss. In fact, the ducked opportunity for a cheap gag is in keeping with the film's strangely half-serious tenor. The cameos from VHS-era action heroes such as Jean-Claude Van Damme and Chuck Norris are meant to elicit chuckles, but while there's the odd acknowledgement of the film's redundancy and the stars' advancing years, for the most part it's a straightforward throwback.

The first reel, in which the titular mercenary gang, led by Barney Ross (Sylvester Stallone), raid a Nepalese village to rescue a Chinese billionaire from a warlord's torture chamber, resembles the model-kit fantasy of a certain kind of nine-year-old boy. Ross's men smash their way into an armed compound in armoured trucks, bazooka and machine-gun a lot of bad guys, rescue the hostage, ride a zip-line back out, mowing down bad guys all the way, before splitting up. Some of them get into a boat; Ross and Lee Christmas (Jason Statham) pick up the team's seaplane. The boat is pursued by bad guys on hovercraft, but sniper Bill (Liam Hemsworth) is able to take a few out, and then Ross and Christmas arrive, landing in the river. The boat team use jet-skis to transfer to the plane, which has then to use its nose-mounted howitzer to blow up a defensive line hastily mounted by yet more bad guys on top of a dam. The seaplane only just clears the top of the dam, contents unharmed, mission accomplished.

As in the first instalment, Stallone has a writing credit but this time cedes direction to Simon West. Boy-logic permits the pointlessness



Sylvester Stallone, Dolph Lundgren

of the split into boat and plane teams (why not all get on the plane?) but even boys, having some sense of drama, put the good guys in real danger once in a while. The whole film might have gone on like this, but once back in the US, it emerges that *The Expendables 2* is going to be more than a dubiously enjoyable romp. When young Bill tells old Barney that mercenary killing is not the career for him, Barney has to reflect on the chain of decisions that made him sacrifice the possibility of what others call ordinary human relations for life as a gun-for-hire. Later, Bill makes a boring speech about the bad things he saw in Afghanistan.

Apart from the recurrent problem that Stallone, sounding like Batman with a cold, is practically inaudible, the effect is preposterous. We've just seen Bill and Barney waste bad guys in the low hundreds, for nothing more than money. It isn't a very edifying sight, and it can't be made so with talk. ☺

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Produced by

Danny Lerner  
Les Weldon

##### Executive Producers

Danny Dimbort  
Boaz Davidson

##### Screenplay

Kevin King-Templeton

##### Story

Richard Wenk

##### Distributor

Sylvester Stallone

##### Based on characters

created by David

##### Cast

Sylvester Stallone

##### Barney Ross

##### Jason Statham

Lee Christmas

##### Jet Li

Yin Yang

##### Dolph Lundgren

Gunner Jensen

##### Chuck Norris

Booker

##### Jean-Claude

Van Damme

##### Bruce Willis

Mr Church

##### Arnold Schwarzenegger

Trench

##### Terry Crews

Hale Caesar

##### Music

Brian Tyler

##### Costume Designer

Lizz Wolf

##### Production Designer

Paul Cross

##### Music

Brian Tyler

##### Costume Designer

Lizz Wolf

##### Production

Barney's

##### Christmas, Inc.

##### Production

Millennium Films,

Lionsgate present a

Nu Image production

##### Randy Couture

Toll Road

##### Distributor

Lionsgate UK

##### 9,228 ft +0 frames

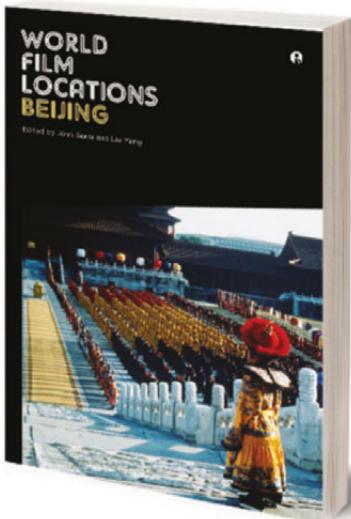
**A band of mercenaries led by Barney Ross attack a fortified Nepalese village in order to free a Chinese billionaire who has been taken hostage by a local warlord. They find that their rival Trench has preceded them, but after a series of skirmishes they escape with the hostage alive. Back in the US, sniper Bill Timmons tells Ross that the next mission will be his last. The same night, Ross's old CIA sparring partner Mr Church returns to call in a debt. To pay it off, Ross must take expert safecracker Maggie to a crashed Chinese aircraft in Albania and retrieve a mysterious device. The team are successful but are immediately ambushed by another mercenary leader, Jean Vilain, who steals their prize and kills Bill. Ross swears vengeance. The device, Maggie reveals, gives the location of a stash of plutonium in an abandoned mine. The team are harried by Vilain's men but are helped by lone wolf Booker, who directs them to a village of potential allies. There they learn that Vilain terrorises the locals and uses them as slave labour. They fight a detachment of Vilain's men, then attack the mine. Vilain escapes with the plutonium and traps the mercenaries and villagers underground. Trench appears unexpectedly and digs them out, and together they pursue Vilain to the airport by helicopter. After a massive gunfight, Ross defeats Vilain in hand-to-hand combat, and the plutonium is secured by the CIA. In Paris, Bill's grieving girlfriend receives a compensatory boxful of cash.**

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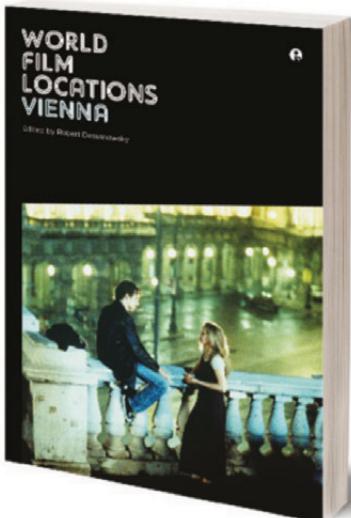
## WORLD FILM LOCATIONS BEIJING

Edited by John Berra and Liu Yang

The title of Li Yu's film *Lost in Beijing* evokes the experience of many first-time visitors to China's bustling capital. The city's sprawling structure and rapid redevelopment—embodied by the high-rise apartments taking over historic districts—render Beijing's streets hard to navigate and its culture just as difficult to penetrate. *World Film Locations: Beijing* is a revealing and engrossing introduction to both.

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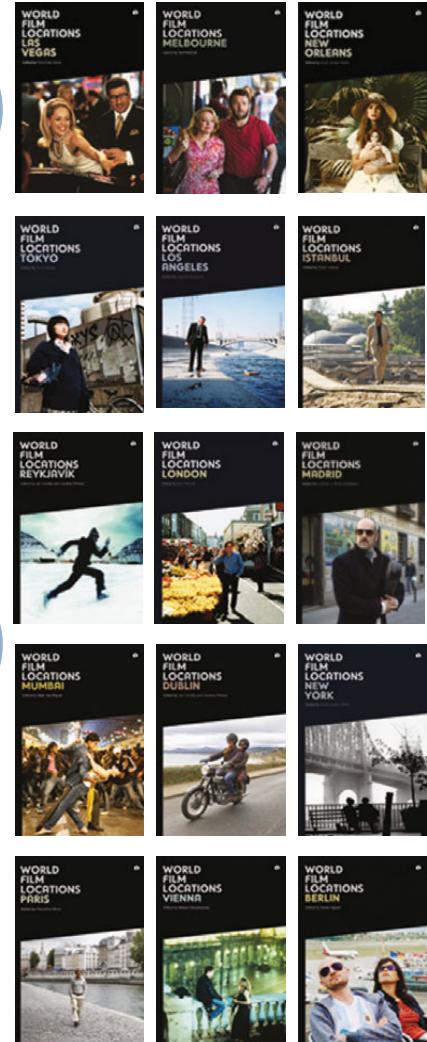
## WORLD FILM LOCATIONS VIENNA

Edited by Robert Dassanowsky

*World Film Locations: Vienna* provides a panorama of international motion pictures shot on location in Austria's once imperial capitol. Informative reviews of 46 film scenes and evocative essays examine for the first time Vienna's relationship to cinema outside the waltz fantasies shot in the studios of Hollywood, London, Paris, Berlin... and Vienna. Illustrations and screen-grabs are set alongside current images, as well as city maps locating 'cinematic Vienna'.

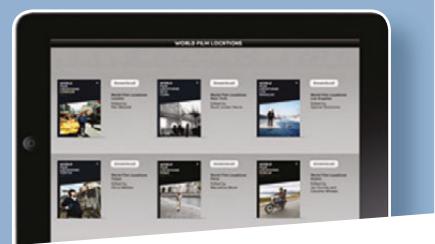
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## False Trail

Sweden/Norway 2011  
Director: Kjell Sundvall

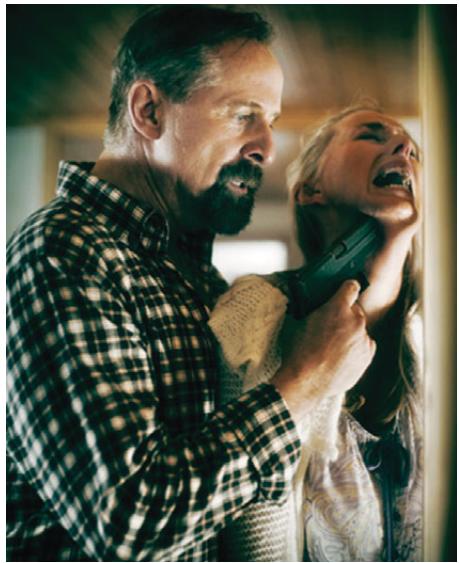
### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The Swedish title of *False Trail* is *Jägarna 2* (*Hunters 2*), making it a belated sequel to *Jägarna* (1996), also directed by Kjell Sundvall. Much of what happened in *Jägarna* – the relationship between Stockholm-based cop Erik Bäckström and his brother Leif, the death of the latter – forms the backstory to the new film. *Jägarna* never got a release over here, but with the current craze for Scandi-crime, the sequel is evidently reckoned likely to attract audiences.

The distributors may be disappointed. Even by Scandi standards, *False Trail* is slow, dogged and repetitious. Erik, the Stockholm-based cop sent north to lead a murder investigation, comes up against Torsten Johansson, his local counterpart, and Torsten's boss, police chief Mats. Erik questions their initial assumptions, meets with scepticism, discovers evidence that points elsewhere. Torsten, the real culprit, destroys or tampers with the evidence. Erik finds something else – and so it goes on for over two hours. The final showdown, melodramatic though it is, comes as something of a relief.

Even so, the film has its points of interest – not least the casting. Rolf Lassgård, reprising his role from *Jägarna* as the stolid, guilt-ridden Erik, played Swedish TV's original Wallander, with whom his character has much in common. As his opponent Torsten, a seething mass of anger and violence beneath his bluff exterior, Swedish-born American actor Peter Stormare (best remembered as taciturn hitman Gaear Grimsrud in *Fargo*) revisits his native country. The clash between them extends further than the standard town cop/country cop face-off (Norrland, the northernmost of Sweden's three provinces, is largely smalltown-rural).

For one thing, there's that backstory, with all its baggage of familial resentments and guilts. Erik is returning, reluctantly, to the district where he grew up. Torsten has married Karin, widow of Erik's brother Leif (for whose suicide Erik feels partly responsible), and thus become stepfather to Erik's nephew Peter. Both Erik and Leif suffered from a brutal father; seeing bruises on Peter's torso, Erik realises



Manhunt: Peter Stormare, Annika Nordin

that violence has infected the next generation. Torsten, meanwhile, uses Erik's part in his brother's death to turn the lad against his uncle and make him conceal evidence.

The film starts with a young woman (who will be found murdered) running desperately through the forest, and cuts from her to a mass hunting party. The implication's that this, like backwoods America, is a society where almost every man has a gun and feels entitled to use it more or less as he wishes. Torsten, it seems, has merely pushed the principle a little too far in gunning down an inconvenient girl he's got pregnant. And his immediate instinct is to frame a Finnish immigrant; as we know from *Wallander* and the Stieg Larsson movies, racism lurks even in Sweden's model liberal state. Like all the recent crop of Scandi-crime dramas, *False Trail* digs down to the faultlines in its society. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Peter Possne  
Björn Carlström  
Per Janérus  
**Written by**  
Björn Carlström  
Stefan Thunberg  
**Director of Photography**  
Jallo Faber  
**Editor**  
Mattias Morheden  
**Production Designer**  
Bengt Fröderberg  
**Music**  
Johan Söderqvist  
**Sound**  
Per Nyström  
**Costume Designer**  
Karin Sundvall

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**Production Companies**  
Sonet Film presents

in association with  
Harmonica Films  
In co-production  
with The Chimney  
Pot, Comax  
Film, Filmpool  
Nord and TV4

With the support  
of Svenska  
Filminstitutet,  
Nordisk Film  
& TV-Fond

#### Cast

**Rolf Lassgård**  
Erik Bäckström  
**Peter Stormare**  
Torsten Johansson  
**Annika Nordin**  
Karin Johansson  
**Kim Tjernström**  
Peter  
**Lo Kauppi**  
Johanna Lager  
**Jesper Barksellus**

Aström  
**Eero Milonoff**  
Jari Lipponen  
**Johan Paulsen**  
Mats Sundelin  
**Gunnar Eklund**  
hunt leader

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Arrow Films  
  
Swedish  
theatrical title  
**Jägarna 2**

**Norrland, northern Sweden, the present. A young woman, Elin Ledin, goes missing in the forest while a hunt is on. Her car is found abandoned and bloodstained. Local police officer Torsten Johansson arrests layabout Finnish immigrant Jari Lipponen, who's already had run-ins with the police. Elin's handbag is discovered at his hut, but Jari insists he found the car empty and robbed it. Stockholm CID officer Erik Bäckström arrives to lead the investigation; he does so reluctantly as he grew up in the area and has bad memories of it.**

**Erik meets Peter, son of his late brother Leif. Karin, Peter's mother, is now married to Torsten. Erik blames himself for Leif's death. Despite Torsten's insistence, supported by local police chief Mats, that Jari is guilty, Erik insists there's insufficient evidence to hold him. He summons his forensic colleague Johanna Lager from Stockholm to help him. Elin's body is found, gutted. Trying to get closer to Peter, Erik goes fishing with the boy; his suspicions start centring on Torsten. Torsten pushes Jari under a truck, making it look like an accident. Mats declares the case closed.**

**Back in Stockholm, Erik tells Johanna he's convinced Torsten is guilty and destroyed the evidence. He returns to Norrland. Karin realises that Torsten was having sex with Elin and she was pregnant. Torsten terrorises her into silence. Peter sees Torsten burying the rifle he shot Elin with, and retrieves it. Torsten pursues him to the river, but Erik arrives on the scene and Torsten shoots himself. Later, Erik takes Peter to the farm where he and Leif grew up.**

## Hit So Hard

USA 2011  
Director: P. David Ebersole

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

The end credits of *Hit So Hard* depict the brief history of female drummers, including a revealing clip from *The Karen Carpenter Story* (1989). Revealing not only because it highlights the (continuing) resistance to women striking the skins, but also because it hints at the connected narrative model with which *Hit So Hard* engages – that of the female icon destroyed by industry pressures.

Patty Schemel's implosion is not as well known as that of Carpenter, or that of Courtney Love, Schemel's bandmate in Hole. As a result, this documentary is less of a prurient opportunity to pull apart a celebrity life. Like Schemel herself, it draws a refreshing distinction between musical talent and the fight to be heard, and the addictive encumbrances of the music industry.

Sharing an apartment with Love and her husband Kurt Cobain in the two years leading up to his death, Schemel witnessed the destructive confusion of the two up close. Her *Hi8* movies of the time – shaky, eccentrically framed and often over or under-exposed – capture both the exciting DIY energy of the grunge era, and the numbing, dissipatory effects of the drugs that many musicians on the scene were using to deal with fame.

Schemel's drug use – like Hole's abrasive music – emerged from rage at the system, as a form of rebellion against her suburban upbringing with its pressures to conform. But as Hole bassist Melissa Auf der Maur notes, Schemel managed not to join the '27 Club' of musicians (like Cobain himself) who do not live beyond their 27<sup>th</sup> year. While drawing attention to the possibility of recovery, *Hit So Hard* (unlike *The Karen Carpenter Story*) treats addiction without moral panic: Love speaks approvingly of Schemel's "amazing sense of humour" about her addiction which, the film implies, played a key part in her recovery.

Interviews with the now-sober Schemel unpack this self-destructive form of resistance, allowing us to hear the radical rebellion of the music for what it is, rather than as a cause (or effect) of addiction. This is highlighted by further interviews with drummers Gina Schock (The Go-Go's), Debbi Peterson (The Bangles) and Alice de Buhr (Fanny) and singer Phranc, who reflect on Schemel's achievement and musicianship in relation to the often-denigrated place of women – and especially lesbians – in rock.

Love – who screams "Kiss my ass, we're Pearl Jam" at a Lollapalooza crowd – speaks articulately about her negotiation of her image, but both Schemel and Auf der Maur reflect on the change in the band's music-making as Love, the celebrity and performer, came to dominate. The band that Hole guitarist Eric Erlandson describes as "an alternative, dysfunctional family" comes to reflect and reproduce the tensions and reactions of the suburban family its members and listeners thought they were rejecting.

The film counterposes an alternative alternative family, one that crosses the boundaries of bands, as Schemel drums for Phranc, and teaches younger women at the Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls in Los Angeles. Beyond the



Fast and furious: Patty Schemel

well-worn story of addiction and recovery – Auf der Maur jokes that Schemel was always going to call her memoirs *I'm Drumming as Fast as I Can* – it's this sense of collaborative continuity and community that frames Schemel's survival. By sounding out a multiplicity of voices from the scene, and trusting the viewer to listen discerningly to their sometimes contradictory accounts, *Hit So Hard* does more than just slam rock. Like many of Hole's best songs, it takes apart the industry while celebrating the joyous rage of music, rhythmically structured by Schemel's live-wire presence. 

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Produced by

Todd Hughes  
Christina Soletti

##### Written by

P. David Ebersole

##### Camera

Larra Anderson

Mark Putnam

John Tanzer

##### Edited by

P. David Ebersole

##### Design Concepts/ Graphic Design

Riot Structure

##### Original Score

Roddy Bottum

##### Sound Mixer

David Malits  
©Ebersoletti  
Filmco, Inc.

##### Production Companies

Ebersoletti Filmco,  
Inc. in association  
with The Ebersole  
Hughes Company,  
Tight Ship  
Productions

##### In Colour

[1.85:1]

##### Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures  
Ltd Pictures Ltd

## Holy Motors

France/Germany 2012  
Director: Leos Carax  
Certificate 18 115m 46s

Reviewed by **Ginette Vincendeau**

See Feature  
on page 26

Cinema is dead (or dying) but all is cinema. This contradictory, Godardian discourse animates Leos Carax's *Holy Motors*, the director's long-awaited fifth feature, his first since *Pola X* in 1999. It is expressed in, among other things, the use of digital cameras, despised by Carax as "computers, not cameras" but which made the project financially possible. From the opening sequence featuring Etienne-Jules Marey's pre-cinematic experiments (deconstructing the movements of a walking man) to the finale in which the actress Edith Scob is – none too subtly – made to wear a mask referencing her part in Georges Franju's *Eyes without a Face* (1960), Carax's film is a cornucopia of references. This is a movie that begins in a cinema, with a man, played by the director, looking through a keyhole. Citations range from canonical art cinema (Franju, Demy, Cocteau, Buñuel and the Villa Poiret, designed by 1920s avant-garde architect Mallet-Stevens, whose work is seen in Marcel L'Herbier films such as *L'Inhumaine*) to Hollywood blockbusters such as *Cars* and *Godzilla*. Carax also alludes to his own films, in particular *Mauvais Sang* (1986), with the brief appearance of an almost unrecognisable Michel Piccoli, and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991), in a scene in the disused department store La Samaritaine which faces the bridge. Last but not least there is Denis Lavant, leading actor and acknowledged alter ego in all of Carax's films except *Pola X*.

*Holy Motors* partly emerged out of Carax's 'Merde' ('Shit') episode in the anthology film *Tokyo!* (2008). In both films Lavant wears outrageous makeup – a vitreous glass eye, lanky red hair and beard, long and bent dirty fingernails – and dons a bright green suit to play a grotesque and frightening creature who emerges from the sewers to shock and terrorise people; he growls in an incomprehensible language, voraciously eats flowers and banknotes, licks women's armpits. In *Holy Motors*, however, 'Monsieur Merde' is one among several identities adopted by 'Monsieur Oscar' (Lavant) as he crosses the city in a white stretch limousine driven by the impeccable

Céline (Scob). His impersonations range from the naturalistic (a wealthy businessman, a concerned father) to the grand-guignolesque (Monsieur Merde) and the virtual, as in the exquisite 'techno-dance' performed by Lavant and a young woman, first 'live' and then as digital graphics. These mini-shows are explicit; we see Lavant ritually applying and unpeeling makeup in the limousine, which is decked out like an actor's dressing room. Yet they are also utterly opaque. Who and what they're for remains mysterious.

Thematically these incarnations are better understood as parables of dying and resurrection or meditations on artifice and authenticity than as offering a coherent message or narrative. In the best auteur cinema tradition, Carax scorns the notion of narrative yet claims a grandiose project ("Is the film telling a story? No, it is narrating a life. The story of a life? No, the experience of being alive") and denies authorial intentionality while reinforcing it: "There's never any initial idea or intention behind a film, but rather a couple of images and feelings that I splice together."

The privileging of "images and feelings" over storytelling indeed characterises the film. Carax, via Oscar, takes the viewer on a helter-skelter ride of moods, emotions and cinematic genres – eroticism, violence, comedy, melodrama, gothic fantasy, the musical. The result is uneven: some scenes go on too long (Oscar killing his double 'Theo', a 'deathbed' scene in a palace). Perhaps unsurprisingly given the focus on Oscar, female characterisation is not a strong point, with the film running the gamut of familiar stereotypes: erotic goddess (Eva Mendes), suicidal gamine (Kylie Minogue), suburban housewife played by... a chimpanzee. And do we really need the limos 'talking' to each other at the end? Yet the film makes up for these lapses with dazzling moments. One is a brief transition showing a group of accordion players in a church, the music stunning, the *mise en scène* a dizzying celebration of lyrical cinematography. Another is the encounter between Oscar and Minogue's Eva, the latter wearing short blonde hair in a clear tribute to Jean Seberg. The scene achieves a rare fusion of cinephilia (citing Demy and Godard), melodramatic affect (Eva's song 



Sunset boulevards: Denis Lavant, Kylie Minogue

and what follows) and social comment – Carax's situating it in the ghostly art-nouveau space of the empty Samaritaine, littered with broken mannequins, to Parisian viewers at least is evocative of the popular department store's controversial closure, in which hundreds of employees were made redundant.

Disused buildings, tributes to past genres and filmmakers, impersonations of cult stars – this all speaks of the nostalgia that pervades *Holy Motors*. Yet this is an innovative film with the power to amaze. Despite the surface similarity to David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis*, both with male heroes crossing a city in a stretch limousine, Carax's film has none of the latter's cold ennui. His is a film full of invention and energy, for which some of the credit must go to Lavant. Carax may say, with typical provocation, that this is "not a film about the cinema, nor about actors", but Lavant's craggy face, histrionic presence and remarkable range dominate *Holy Motors*. To the old man in the car (Piccoli) who asks, "Why do you carry on being Oscar?" he replies, "For the beauty of the gesture." It's a phrase that goes for the whole film. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Martine Marignac

#### Written by

Leos Carax

#### Directors of Photography

Caroline Champetier  
Yves Cape

#### Editor

Nelly Quettier

#### Art Director

Florian Sanson

#### Sound

Erwan Kerzant

#### Costume Designer

Emmanuel Croset

#### Production Companies

Martine Marignac,  
Maurice Tinchant  
and Albert Prevost

present a Pierra  
Grise Productions,  
Theo Films, Pandora

Film, Arte France  
Cinéma, WDR/  
ARTE production

Grise Productions,  
Theo Films, Pandora

Film, Arte France  
Cinéma, WDR/  
ARTE production

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With the support of the MEDIA

Programme of the European Union,  
Région Ile-de-France and Procirep/Angoa,

FFA - Mini Traité,  
Medienboard Berlin

Brandenburg In association with Soficinéma 8 and Wild Bunch

#### Cast

Denis Lavant

M. Oscar/banker/

beggar/motion

capture man/

'M. Merde'/father

accordionist/killer/

victim/dying man/

man in foyer

Edith Scob

Céline

Kylie Minogue

Eva Grace (Jean)

Jeanne Disson

Angèle

Michel Piccoli

man with birthmark

#### Elise Lhomeau

Lea (Elise)

#### Eva Mendes

Kay M

#### Leos Carax

sleepier

#### Nastya Golubeva

Carax

little girl

#### Reda Oumouzoune

mocap acrobat

#### Zlata

#### Contorsionniste

cyber-woman

#### Geoffrey Cary

photographer

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Artificial Eye

Film Company

10,419 ft 0+ frames

#### Cast

Denis Lavant

M. Oscar/banker/

beggar/motion

capture man/

'M. Merde'/father

accordionist/killer/

victim/dying man/

man in foyer

Edith Scob

Céline

Kylie Minogue

Eva Grace (Jean)

Jeanne Disson

Angèle

Michel Piccoli

man with birthmark

**Paris, the present. A prologue shows a sleepy man going through the wall of his bedroom into a forest and then a cinema. For the rest of the film we follow 'Monsieur Oscar' being driven through Paris in a white stretch limousine by an elegant older woman, Céline, to a series of assignations. These are performances (the limo serving as dressing room) that range from the naturalistic to the grotesque, for which the man dresses up as, among others, a corporate businessman, a female beggar, a thug and a dying old man. There is a techno-erotic dance, a cannibalistic scene in a cemetery in which Oscar impersonates the character 'Monsieur Merde' (Mr Shit), the 'killing' of his double, a father-and-daughter encounter and a musical duet with a blonde woman in the disused La Samaritaine department store. At the end of the night, the limousine is parked with others and the cars 'talk' to each other.**

## Hope Springs

Director: David Frankel

Certificate 12A 99m 52s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Films about the problems of a mature marriage are rarer than hen's teeth. Most often (as in *The Notebook* or *Away from Her*) they're chiefly concerned with crises, what Alzheimer's does to partnerships, or in the case of *Shall We Dance* (2004) a male midlife blip. Thus *Hope Springs*, despite its cosy comedy and starry casting, is rather novel in squarely addressing the stale, sexless empty-nester marriage, a topic usually firmly corralled in daytime talk shows and Lifetime TV movies.

Director David Frankel describes his film as a romantic comedy about a 30-year marriage. Indeed, Kay (Meryl Streep) and Arnold (Tommy Lee Jones) are apart while together, living parallel lives with little conversation and less intimacy as the film opens ("I feel like I'm married to ESPN," Kay moans). When Arnold rebuffs Kay's attempt at sex, and scoffs at her marriage-makeover plans as expensive folly, one struggles to identify any comedy, let alone any romance. But once she has whisked them to New England for intensive couples therapy with Dr Feld (an unnervingly and unswervingly straight role for Steve Carell), *Hope Springs* starts to vary its gentle dramedy mode. As Kay and the reluctant Arnold struggle like shy teenagers with cuddling exercises and sensate focus massage, the film sets a respectful but realistic tone in representing older sexuality. The preview audience gasped and tittered uncomfortably at the sight of Kay masturbating under the covers, and at the couple uneasily discussing sexual fantasies – this really is a taboo area for mainstream cinema.

And Frankel's take on it is homelier and more downbeat than Nancy Meyers's glossy sixtiesomething sex farces such as *It's Complicated* (2009). Still, he and screenwriter Vanessa Taylor (*Game of Thrones*) can't resist wringing some laughs from Kay's attempts to master new sexual frontiers with a bunch of bananas, a roll of cookie dough and a copy of *Sex Tips for Straight Women from a Gay Man*. More ambiguous is the spectacle of Kay attempting oral sex on Arnold in an arthouse cinema but giving up in frustration. It makes for a curiously funny-sad



**Fresh fields: Tommy Lee Jones, Meryl Streep**

scene, one that's heightened by the extradiegetic incongruity of seeing two distinguished movie actors thrashing about in the tip-up seats.

Thankfully Streep and Jones give of their game and subtle best, despite the film's slight story and hokey premise, and their straight-faced bewilderment is a definite boon. Her voice light and nervous, Streep's shy but stubborn Kay is a neat, unshowy performance, one that never slips into parodying the character's provincialism. Jones, who has the harder role as Arnold moves from grumpy couch potato to ardent wooer, is even better, as he cracks his character's carapace of indifference little by little. Careful art direction and costuming (Kay's matronly pant-suits, the windcheater shielding Arnold against the emotional striptease of therapy) bolster their portrayals, as does Taylor's stripped-down script, which gives due weight to the difficulties of couples therapy, and their partial failure at it.

Frankel, who specialises in the soft-centred comedy (*Marley & Me*, *The Devil Wears Prada*) predictably slaps on the stickily sentimental ending that the genre demands. Nonetheless, there's something pleasingly daring about the willingness of *Hope Springs* to illuminate the grey-haired challenges that Hollywood, eagerly catering to younger audiences, would rather overlook. Score one for the baby-boomers. S

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Todd Black

Guymon Casady

#### Written by

Vanessa Taylor

#### Director of Photography

Florian Ballhaus

#### Editor

Steven Weisberg

#### Production Designer

Stuart Wurtzel

#### Music

Theodore Shapiro

#### Sound

TBC

#### Costume Designer

Ann Roth

#### Production Companies

Columbia Pictures,

Mandate Pictures,

Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Pictures

present a Film 360/

#### Escape Artists

production

A David Frankel film

#### Executive Producers

Steve Tisch

Jason Blumenthal

Nathane Kahane

Jessie Nelson

#### CAST

Meryl Streep

Kay

Tommy Lee Jones

Arnold

Steve Carell

Dr Bernard Feld

Jean Smart

Eileen

Ben Rappaport

Brad

Marin Ireland

Molly

Patch Darragh

Mark

Brett Rice

#### Vince

Becky Ann Baker

Cora

Elisabeth Shue

Karen

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

Sound/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Momentum Pictures

8,988ft 0+ frames

**Omaha, present day. Sixtiesomething Kay is unhappy about her long-atrophied and sex-free marriage to grouchy, frugal Arnold. She buys a week of intensive couples therapy in New England with celebrity therapist Dr Bernard Feld, and Arnold reluctantly accompanies her. Arnold balks at the first discussion of sex and a 'holding' exercise. Kay accuses him of being a bully and runs off. At night, tentatively, they try the exercise. The next day they relate their sexual fantasies to Dr Feld; later, Arnold abandons a 'sensate focus' exercise, which Kay continues alone. They confess their respective grievances separately for the next session. Kay is thinking of leaving Arnold. She makes an aborted attempt at oral sex with Arnold in a cinema; she also buys a sex guide on Dr Feld's recommendation, and practises its techniques. Arnold, realising the need for change, takes her to a plush restaurant and hotel room. However, sex is abandoned when Arnold is unable to look at Kay's face. Crushed by their failure, they go home. Arnold comes to Kay's bedroom and tells her she's beautiful; they have sex and are reconciled. They renew their vows on a beach.**

## Hysteria

USA/France/Luxembourg/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Tanya Wexler

Certificate 15 99m 6s

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

*Hysteria* is a film about women's bodies and minds, its title's witty dual meaning alluding both to the condition associated with female sexuality and also to the general cultural reaction to said sexuality. A romantic comedy about the invention of the vibrator in the 1880s, it features a barnstorming performance from Maggie Gyllenhaal as socialist firebrand Charlotte Dalrymple, the best screen suffragist since *Mary Poppins* (1964) and a welcome alternative to the shrews, hookers, harridans and highly tolerant angels who have characterised the romcom trend — and to the overdetermined

amateur dramatics of Keira Knightley's Sabine Spielrein in David Cronenberg's recent take on a similar subject in *A Dangerous Method*.

Unlike Sabine, Charlotte refuses the diagnosis of sexual neurosis, insisting that women would benefit far more from respect and financial independence than from easy access to orgasm. And were she the central protagonist, Tanya Wexler's film would be more than just a conventional romantic comedy with a crowd-pleasing blend of body humour and sentimental resolution, and would instead be the Ibsen-esque drama about a New Woman fighting her times to which it occasionally aspires. But Charlotte's passionate vision of a possible world isn't permitted either to set the film's tone or be its beating heart.

Instead our point of view, like the film's form, is more conventional. The central character is the handsome yet impoverished Dr Mortimer Granville (Hugh Dancy). Classically liberal (he believes in hygiene and treats poor patients in urgent need), he is nevertheless floored by Charlotte's suggestion that perhaps his patients need more than a quick seeing-to with the electric feather duster he invents. While Charlotte's bold actions keep things lively, the tempo that informs the insistently light comic tone is set by the repetition of Mortimer bringing his patients to orgasm (although the film is surprisingly coy about how). As the women become addicted to Mortimer's treatment there's a suggestion of a taboo-busting rebellion — but alas both the characters and the film remain subject to Mortimer's manipulation.

In fact, the film invites us to laugh at the women's addiction, and at the inarticulate volubility their gratification prompts. Most of Mortimer's patients get little 'dialogue' other than performing outré orgasmic noises: an unpleasant and even misogynistic joke. Given its focus on male control and delivery of the clitoral orgasm as the route to women's happiness (as opposed to, say, the political right to control over their own bodies), it's about as feminist, on the surface, as *Playboy*.

And yet. In the current cultural moment, with female state legislators in Michigan banned from the House for saying the word 'vagina' during a debate about abortion, there's undoubtedly a frisson in *Hysteria's* foregrounding of female sexual pleasure (albeit not desire or embodiment), and American reviewers have made considerable claims for its political significance. It's laudable in its attempt to give Charlotte the space and stirring language to articulate her views — not only in private but also in the dock, when she's arrested for punching a policeman after interrupting a society party to secure medical treatment for a working-class patient.

But as with its favouring of Mortimer's point of view — and like him when he 'defends' Charlotte as hysterical — the film claims to privilege women's experience, only to use it to serve the status quo. Through Gyllenhaal's role, which resounds with memories of her astounding breakout performance in *Secretary* (2002), the film promises more than it can deliver, not unlike Granville's invention. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Sarah Curtis  
Judy Cairo  
Tracey Becker

**Story/Screenplay**  
Stephen Dyer  
Jonah Lisa Dyer  
Original story by  
Howard Gensler

**Director of  
Photography**  
Sean Bobbitt  
**Film Editor**  
Jon Gregory  
**Production  
Designer**  
Sophie Becher  
**Composer**  
Gast Waltzing  
**Sound Recordist**  
Martin Trevis  
**Costume Designer**  
Nic Ede

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Classics

**Production  
Companies**  
An Informant Media  
and Forthcoming  
Films production  
in association with  
Beachfront Films  
and Chimera Films  
in co-production  
with By Alternative  
Pictures, Delux  
Productions, Arte  
France Cinéma  
Made with the  
support of Film Fund  
Luxembourg, Arte  
France Cinéma,  
WDR/Arte, Canal +  
In association with

**Smythe**  
**Kim Criswell**  
Mrs Castellari

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing

8,919 ft +0 frames

#### Cast

**Hugh Dancy**  
Mortimer Granville

**Maggie Gyllenhaal**  
Charlotte Dalrymple

**Jonathan Pryce**  
Dr Robert Dalrymple

**Felicity Jones**  
Emily Dalrymple

**Ashley Jensen**  
Fannie

**Sheridan Smith**  
Molly

**Gemma Jones**  
Lady St John-Smythe

**Georgie Glen**  
Mrs Parsons

**Anna Chancellor**  
Mrs Bellamy

**Rupert Everett**  
Edmund St John-Smythe

**Malcolm Rennie**  
Lord St John-Smythe

**London, the 1880s. Dr Mortimer Granville loses his job due to his insistence on hygiene. Facing mounting bills, he takes a position as assistant to society doctor Robert Dalrymple, who treats his wealthy female patients' hysteria through manual pelvic massage, which brings on orgasms. Handsome Dr Granville proves popular with Dalrymple's patients, and also with his daughters Emily and Charlotte. The latter runs a foundation for working-class women. Exhausted by his labours, Granville confides in his eccentric friend Edmund St John-Smythe, who has been experimenting with electric-powered cleaning implements. With the aid of sex worker Molly, they discover that the electric feather duster is highly stimulating, revolutionising Granville and Dalrymple's business. Granville and Emily become engaged, though Granville is attracted to Charlotte, who is arrested after punching a policeman at a society party. At her trial she refuses to accept the diagnosis of hysteria that her father persuades Granville to deliver. Granville breaks off his engagement to Emily and meets Charlotte on her release from prison to offer her marriage in line with her vision of equality.**

## I Against I

United Kingdom 2012

Directors: Mark Cripps, David Ellison, James Marquand

Certificate 15 84m 0s

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

An excessively self-conscious homage to John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967), Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samouraï* (1967) and Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) that never comes close to matching their perfect balance of form and content, the awkwardly titled *I Against I* is hamstrung from the start by a convoluted screenplay and characters who never rise above the crudely archetypal (Kenny Doughty's cocky City wideboy Drake, Ingvar Eggert Sigurdsson's grim-faced assassin Revchenko, Mark Womack's excitable sadist Joseph, Sónia Balacó's femme fatale Sophia).

Given the evidently tiny budget, there's clearly some ambition in the visual treatment of London as a lattice of nocturnal streets dominated by gleaming glass and metal structures (mirrored by the pulsing blips on the electronic device tracking Drake and Revchenko, cynically hired by Joseph to murder each other): the emptiness of the place in the small hours, in contrast to a genuinely 24-hour city like New York or LA, is convincingly caught. But the endless cat-and-mouse games quickly become wearying, especially when other hitmen are gratuitously stirred into an already contrived mix. By manipulating the audience as blatantly as Joseph manipulates Drake and Revchenko, the film risks making them just as resentful, especially when the payoff is both predictable and oddly muted. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Krystian Kozlowski  
James Marquand  
Matthew Whyte

**Written by**

Mark Cripps  
David Ellison

James Marquand

**Director of  
Photography**

Matthew Whyte

**Editor**

Anton Short

**Art Directors**

Stuart May

Danny Newton

**Music**

Extreme Music

**Production  
Sound Mixer**

Ludovic Lasserre

**Costume Designer**

Anna Biggerstaff

Raquel Azevedo

©Stray Dog Films

#### Production Companies

Stray Dog Films in  
association with  
IAI Films presents  
a Stray Dogs Film

**Executive Producer**

Peter Slack

#### Cast

**Kenny Doughty**

Ian Drake

**Ingvar Sigurdsson**

Isaac Revchenko

**Mark Womack**

Joseph Carmichael

**Sónia Balacó**

Sophia Carmichael

**John Castle**

Tommy Carmichael

**Robert Shannan**

hitman

**Epi Taione**

Tonga

**Paul McGratton**

**Sam**  
**Ian Keir Attard**  
Terrance

**Jenna Goodwin**  
Helen

**Francesca Kingdom**  
Danielle

**Xavier Barnett**  
preacher

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Stray Dog/Miracle

7,560 ft +0 frames

**London, the present. Following the murder of Tommy Carmichael, his son Joseph interrogates Ian Drake, grudgingly accepts his innocence, and orders him to kill the other suspect, Isaac Revchenko, by 6am. Revchenko has in turn been ordered to kill Drake. The latter has been having an affair with Joseph's wife Sophia, who originally hired Revchenko to kill her husband; the two men gradually become aware of this after various encounters in a café, a hotel and a restaurant, one of which involves Revchenko killing Drake's friend Tonga. Joseph, monitoring their progress via tracking devices, hires a hitman to kill both of them. Drake is kidnapped by the hitman, who is killed by Revchenko. Joseph — who, it transpires, murdered Tommy — kills himself playing a game of Russian roulette with Sophia. While she frantically tries to contact Drake, he and Revchenko point their guns at each other and pull the trigger.**

# Keyhole

Canada/USA 2011  
Director: Guy Maddin

## Reviewed by Carmen Gray

Shot in shimmering black-and-white, Canadian director Guy Maddin's *Keyhole* is an audacious pastiche about a *noir*-world gangster on a Homeric odyssey through his own ghost-filled house. While its amalgam of classic genres slots in with the current trend for nostalgia for the lost magic of early-era cinema, Maddin has been making films like this since the late 1980s. Surpassing the superficially feelgood, soullessly imitative nature of Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2011), Maddin's charmingly surreal evocations (such as *The Saddest Music in the World* and the silent *Cowards Bend the Knee*) exhibit a unique auteurist sensibility and palpable emotional longing.

*Keyhole* revisits Maddin's obsession with memory and the past's residue with a deadpan mirth that prevents it ever feeling pretentious. It opens with hardened 30s-era gangster Ulysses Pick (Jason Patric, with the strong-jawed handsomeness of classic Hollywood) returning to his former home through a shootout. Rain lashes the windowpanes; guns blaze outside. In the first of many amusingly absurd moments, Pick regroups his motley entourage by instructing the living among them to turn to him, and the dead – who function as if still living – to face the wall. With its boarded-up windows, candlesticks and stuffed hunting trophies, this is the archetypal haunted house, inside which the lines between life and death blur indeterminately.

Pick's motives for returning home run deeper than refuge. Echoing the quest of his namesake in Homer's *Odyssey*, this absentee patriarch embarks on a journey through the shadowy passages and rooms to return to his wife Hyacinth (regular Maddin collaborator Isabella Rossellini), locked in the marital bedroom. With the frayed logic of a feverish dream, the house reflects Pick's own mind, brimming with psychosexual visions, past guilts and bitter longings. Noisy dysfunction reigns. Scantly clad, weary ghosts engage in sexual kink. A penis poked through a wall gathers dust along with the decor, and homoeroticism undermines the gangster's macho bearing.

The beleaguered male driven to extreme lengths by unattainable love is a familiar Maddin figure, though here, in place of the witty intertitles of his previous films, the narration comes from Hyacinth's white-haired father. A dab hand at wry, poetically phrased wisdom despite his compromising circumstances – stark naked and chained to his daughter's bed – he urges Pick to "remember", stressing the house's function as a repository of memory even while deeming it a strange labyrinth from which all happiness has departed. Pick calls through the keyhole, offering to return lost items to his wife (a tin acrobat, his son's bowl); these objects take on a talismanic quality as links to the past. Each time, she stubbornly refuses him admission.

Though surrounded by family, Pick struggles to recognise them. Absence and neglect weigh on his psyche. A hallucinatory vision shows his daughter's head in a flowerpot under a forget-me-not, desperate for watering with tears. He recalls that the moment Hyacinth seemed most a stranger to him (naked, running like a beast



House of uncommons: Jason Patric

through the hallway with a pack of dogs) was when he loved her most. Clocks tick throughout the house. Outside, bodies are interred in what was once a garden but is now a dark, depthless bog. The freely associative tumult of dreamlike scenes is hard to pin down amid the murk and deliriously edited close-ups, but it adds up to a sense that domestic familiarity and order can't triumph over the primal recesses of the subconscious as time unstoppably advances. The liminal reigns to such an extent that even the radio is tuned in between stations.

While the film's loopy, idiosyncratic surrealism enchants from the outset, its meandering does lose traction. While bearing similar themes, it is less personalised, and ultimately less effective, than Maddin's prior film *My Winnipeg* (2007), an autobiographical docufantasia offering a quirky vision of his hometown and memories of his childhood house marked with life's inevitable traumas. But though never quite feeling whole, *Keyhole* has enough wonderful moments to sustain its charm – not

least the appearance of Udo Kier as Dr Lemke, steeped in majestic old-world macabre, who's called out to examine a drowned girl. Declaring her unsalvageably waterlogged, he advises a coin be placed in her mouth for the boatman.

The film's title foregrounds the audience's role as voyeur to Maddin's calling up of spectres from bygone times, who also roam his projection installations (*Haunings* was exhibited at last year's Berlin Film Festival). Strange inventions – a message-sending 'family organiser', a school-project electric chair with "enough voltage to kill an ox" – fill the home in *Keyhole*. The spirits themselves let off electrical sparks on human contact. Just as the house conducts energy, so Maddin – through playing with the ghostly quality of the captured image – reveals film as a transmitter for memory, a strange storage contraption for a past it resurfaces for us in the present by illusorily collapsing time. In so doing, he pierces the heart of our doomed enchantment with cinema – which brims with our desires, but that we can never actually touch. ☀

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producer

Jody Shapiro  
Jean du Toit

### Screenplay

George Toles  
Guy Maddin

### Director of Photography

Ben Kasulke

### Editor

John Gurdebeke

### Production Designer

Richard Alms

### Sound Mixer

Stan Mak

### Costume Designer

Heather Neale

### ©Cinema Atelier

Tovar Ltd.

### Production Companies

Entertainment

One presents

Commissioned by the

Wexner Center for

### the Arts at the Ohio State University

Produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada, Manitoba Film & Music, Astral's Harold Greenberg Fund

Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit, The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit

Executive Producer

Phyllis Laing

### Cast

Jason Patric  
Ulysses Pick  
Isabella Rossellini  
Hyacinth  
Udo Kier  
Dr Lemke  
Brooke Palsson  
Denny

### David Wontner

Manners  
Louis Negin  
Calypso/Camille  
Kevin McDonald  
Ogilbe

### Daniel Enright

Big Ed

### Olivia Rameau

Rochelle

### Tattiawna Jones

Lota

### In Colour [2.35:1]

### Distributor

Soda Pictures

**Winnipeg, an indeterminate era. Gangster Ulysses Pick** returns home through a shootout after a long absence, with an entourage including his son Manners. The dead among them function as if still living. Pick embarks on a journey through the house to reach his wife Hyacinth, who has locked herself in her bedroom. Her naked father is chained to her bed, and a suitor pays visits. Pick encounters his four children but has trouble recognising them. He offers his wife household items through the keyhole, but she stubbornly won't admit him. Dr Lemke pays a house call to examine soaked blind girl Denny, Manners's ex-girlfriend, and declares her drowned. Pick finally enters the bedroom with an extra key. Hyacinth chisels through her father's chain; rejoicing, he evaporates. Pick witnesses his adopted son, who previously killed one of his biological sons, in a clinch with his daughter Lota; they also evaporate. Reunited with Denny, Manners gives her a key for coming and going as she pleases. Pick shoots Hyacinth's suitor, then plays a game with his family to return items to their former position. The clock strikes 12. Pick is back calling for Hyacinth outside her door.

## The Knot

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Jesse Lawrence  
Certificate 15 91m 50s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

Hot on the heels of *The Wedding Video* comes another British comedy based around an amateur wedding film. But instead of focusing on character humour as that film does, *The Knot* concerns itself with farcical events on the day itself, mostly predictable and overplayed. When the best man hovers over a full toilet showing off the wedding ring to his chum, it doesn't take much guesswork to know where that ring will end up. Such a joke could work with strong, brisk comic timing but this is something director Jesse Lawrence fails to deliver in his debut feature.

While the narrative is plodding, the script – penned by cast members Noel Clarke, Davie Fairbanks and Geoff Carino – has brief moments of wit exploring diversity in relationships: the makers of the wedding video are an outwardly cynical pair who turn out to be secretly married; bridesmaid Sarah (Mena Suvari) is revealed to be gay. The performances from Clarke and Suvari, and from Talulah Riley and Matthew McNulty as bride and groom Alexandra and Jeremy, are likeable, but their characters lack background. (Why do posh Alexandra's Spanish parents barely speak English, for example, or understand British customs?)

Unusually, *The Knot* actually improves towards the end, its wedding-party scene the most authentic and romantic in the film. Whether it's worth the journey is another question. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Enrico Tessarin

Noel Clarke

Roslyn Hill

#### Producers

Junior Quartet

Jason Maza

Davie Fairbanks

Geoff Carino

#### Director of Photography

Trevor Forrest

#### Editor

Tom Hemmings

#### Production Designer

Paul Burns

#### Composer

Adam Lewis

#### Production Sound Mixer

Paul Cameron

#### Costume Designer

Andy Blake

#### Production Companies

The Works UK

Distribution presents

New Treatment and Unstoppable

Entertainment in association with beActive

Entertainment

#### Executive Producers

Josh Varney

Johnny Fewings

Hakan Kousetta

#### Cast

Noel Clarke

Peter

Mena Suvari

Sarah

Matthew McNulty

Jeremy

Talulah Riley

Alexandra

#### Cast

Jason Maza

Ralphus

Susannah Fielding

Julie

Davie Fairbanks

Jack

Brett Goldstein

Albert

Louise Dylan

Helen

Rhoda Montemayor

Anisha

Juliet Oldfield

Mandy

Vincenzo Nicoli

Mr Fernandez

Geoff Carino

Mr Ling

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

The Works UK

Distribution Ltd

8,265 ft +0 frames

**London, the present.** Alexandra and Jeremy are getting married. Mishaps from the wedding morning are intercut with interview footage from their wedding video. As a prank, best man Peter has arranged for Jeremy to wake up next to a man in drag. Meanwhile he's forgotten to book a car to take them to the wedding. Bridesmaid Julie has an accident in the bridal limo and ends up in A&E having stitches on her rear. The groom's party arrive at the wrong church and are chased away by angry guests. All parties finally arrive and, after a misunderstanding about the man in Jeremy's bed is cleared up, the wedding goes ahead. Jeremy's angry ex causes a scene but is placated. Julie decides to leave her abusive husband and stay with Peter. Bridesmaid Sarah reveals that she's gay and gets together with the female makeup artist. The party ends happily.

## Liberal Arts

USA 2011  
Director: Josh Radnor

### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

L.P. Hartley may have written that the past is a foreign country, but that's not always the case. Like many universities, Kenyon College, where most of Josh Radnor's *Liberal Arts* takes place, is stuck in a kind of temporal loop. Tutors, buildings, bookshops, parties – all stay the same as the years pass. The only thing that changes is the students, whose time there is but fleeting and yet who remain indelibly marked by an experience they consider unique to themselves.

Radnor stars in his self-penned, self-directed film as 35-year-old Jesse, a stagnating school admissions officer ready for a change. Stewing in the boredom of adult life – two-bed rental, a job that pays the bills, one long-term relationship just over, another doubtless not far off – Jesse flees New York for his alma mater at the behest of his former professor Peter (the ever-excellent Richard Jenkins, playing with type as a dorky sad-sack), who wants him to speak at his retirement dinner. Here, Peter's friends introduce Jesse to their daughter Elizabeth (Zibby for short), a sophomore studying drama. He is struck by Zibby's take on improv theatre, in which a performer must always say yes to any suggestion. He is perhaps more captivated by the fact that of all the adults around the table he is the only one to catch on.

Occupying the space (both literally and metaphorically) between two generations, it's small surprise that Jesse is drawn to Zibby's peach-skinned, wide-eyed incarnation of youth and innocence over her parents' settled domesticity, particularly given that he is back in the place of his own coming of age.

Seated on the single bed in Zibby's shared dorm room, however, Jesse begins to see the relationship as the regressive step that Peter – also struggling with ageing – suggests it might be. Jesse is a classic Peter Pan figure – only this boy who doesn't want to grow up finds to his mortification that at some point he has.

*Liberal Arts* is hardly a radical departure for Radnor. Riffing on the same themes and characters that populated his 2010 debut feature *Happythankyoumoreplease*, it also leans heavily on the sitcom set-ups and televisual aesthetics of his best-known work as an actor, *How I Met Your Mother*. On the plus side, this results in brisk, breezy pacing, neat comic timing and a measured balance of the serious and the sentimental. A rather bland visual style (including a tired montage of New York City streets) and a predilection for pat resolutions are, however, the drawbacks. By comparison with Sarah Polley's *Take This Waltz*, for example – to which it might be considered something of a thirtysomethings-in-crisis companion piece – it's a far less flawed film, but it also takes fewer risks.

And if there's something terribly pedestrian about *Liberal Arts*, a more properly awkward problem is its implicit misogyny. Elizabeth Olsen offers a sweet, gracious and surprisingly mature (indeed perhaps too mature) performance as Zibby, but the condescending May-December romance still grates. Radnor doesn't help matters by juxtaposing the naive 19-year-old virgin with Allison Janney's jaded professor, a bitter sexual predator who doesn't hold back when ripping Jesse's romantic illusions to shreds. As Jesse's ultimate, age-appropriate



Student love: Elizabeth Olsen, Josh Radnor

girlfriend Ana, Elizabeth Reaser has little more to do than sit back and simper. But Radnor keeps his Woody Allen-esque self-obsessive sufficiently on the right side of self-aware to keep him from disappearing up his own backside, and the film is undeniably charming. There's something about the way it oozes sincerity – from Jesse's earnest assertion (from David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*) that "the purpose of fiction is to combat loneliness" to the lovingly crafted shots of Kenyon College (from whence Radnor himself graduated) – that engenders fondness. After *Happythankyoumoreplease*, *Liberal Arts* once more proves Radnor to be an elegant, engaging, wholly likeable lead, and a competent writer-director. If he wants to evolve beyond his television roots, though, he might yet have to do a little growing up. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Brice Dal Farra  
Clade Dal Farra  
Lauren Munsch

#### Written by

Josh Radnor

#### Director of Photography

Seamus Tierney  
Edited by

Michael R. Miller

#### Production Designer

Jade Healy

#### Music

Ben Toth

#### Sound Mixer

Jim Morgan

#### Costume Designer

Deborah Newhall

#### ©Strategic Motion Ventures LLC

#### Production Companies

Strategic Motion Ventures presents

#### a BCDF Pictures production in association with Tom Sawyer Entertainment

#### Executive Producers

Paul Prokop  
Peter Graham  
Stephen Hays

#### Cast

Josh Radnor  
Jesse Fisher

Elizabeth Olsen  
Zibby

Richard Jenkins  
Professor Peter

Hoberg

Allison Janney  
Professor Judith

Fairchild

John Magaro  
Dean

Elizabeth Reaser  
Ana

Kate Burton  
Susan

#### Robert Desiderio

David  
Ali Ahn

Vanessa  
Kristen Bush

Leslie  
Gregg Edelman

Robert  
Zac Efron

Nat  
Ned Daunis

Eric

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Picturehouse/  
Revolver  
Entertainment

## London Babylon

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Julien Temple  
Certificate 15 127m 51s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Ah, London, that obscure corner of the globe, so frequently neglected in coverage of the UK! If only someone would assert its centrality to British culture and inform the world of its profusion of ethnicities, contradictions and activities! Didn't something happen there in the 1960s, after all? And hey, it's a long shot, but might there be a song by The Clash that would work over a collage of skyline shots?

Given that piled-up archive footage – grubby East End moppets playing with shrapnel + swinging dollybirds + punks spitting + Thatcher casting a beady glare + yuppies barking into brick-sized phones – is pretty much the standard televisual shorthand for London, and that the city has been frequently and exhaustively psychoanalysed in books and films and TV shows, it's perhaps inevitable that Julien Temple's exuberant portrait feels a touch stale at points. Britons who don't dwell in London, meanwhile, might well feel that further emphasis of the capital's importance is the last thing that a terminally metrocentric culture requires. But even if it feels far from necessary, Temple's warm, ramshackle collage hits on some lovely ways into the vagaries of London life past and present. His diligent interviews with elderly Londoners, known and unknown, are as priceless and touching as only personal testimony can be. The archive footage, meanwhile, emphasises the extraordinary post-digital shift that has seen ordinary lives go from retaining scant and sparing permanent records to being obsessively documented in all their minutiae. Temple's film ends on scenes – the Occupy movement taking over St Paul's, the Olympic preparations kicking off – that didn't need filmmakers to document them, since they were being logged on countless amateurs' mobile phones and other devices. If we're all documentarians now, the sort of pearl-diving job done here by Temple and his crew won't be required for the next phase of London's history: it will self-document.

So for all its emphasis on modernity and forward momentum, this film has a nostalgic cast. It celebrates the painstaking effort that went into preserving ordinary histories before technology made that a cinch; and it underlines the immeasurable importance of collating the stories of pre-internet lives before they're all extinguished. (Temple could easily have framed a whole film around just one remarkable interviewee, the 106-year-old peace activist Hetty Bower.)

Temple clearly has a point to make about immigration, and the film centralises the positive impact of outsiders on the city's development. Yet its political content takes the form of an onslaught of ideas rather than an argument, the connecting point being Londoners' willingness to take to the streets to demand or protest. There is a danger here that Temple, with his marked and not uncharming attraction to disorder and nose-thumbing, comes to collate all of London's rebellions – suffragettes! Mosley's fascists! Wasted flower children! Summer 2011 rioters! – into an indistinguishable mass of loveable anti-establishment hijinks, as neatly and presciently romanticised in

Temple's interview with the late Malcolm McLaren: "Now and again, the mob breaks out."

McLaren gets an onscreen credit, but Temple's decision to let us know only intermittently who's speaking is problematic: a proliferation of unidentified voices might make sense in the context of replicating London's cacophony of viewpoints and tones, but when it comes to footage of the 2011 London riots and a voice saying, "It was like Christmas had come early, taking all the nice stuff you want," you kind of want to know who's speaking, and in what context. Snippets of dialogue from fiction films are similarly jumbled up with interview fragments, and clips from fiction films with actuality footage – an approach that nakedly compromises responsible journalistic sourcing and thus arguably rather dilutes the impact of the very thoughtful and well-selected one-on-one interviews.

In a sense there are about three films going on here: a hectic gallery installation of purloined images mimicking London's mania; a sober piece of reminiscence work covering public activism in the 20th century; and a historiographer's attempt to impose narrative consistency on chaos. Seekers after thorough, fact-checked reporting and analysis may succumb to a mass headache. Londoners may feel unduly co-opted into the romantically apathetic new Blitz mentality distilled in the closing quote from trade unionist Brian Nicholson – "Fuck the lot of ya" – which ultimately is a bit of a cop-out. But Temple's film, like his similarly ragged and instinctive 2006 film tribute to the Glastonbury Festival, harbours plentiful priceless moments and enjoys itself infectiously. It says too much to say anything particularly focused or cogent but it's a dizzy, enjoyable ride, and a generous, winning showcase for its interviewees. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Amanda Temple  
Stephen Malit

#### Produced by

Julien Temple

#### Written by

Julien Temple

#### Director of Photography

Stephen Organ

#### Editor

Caroline Richards

#### Original Music

JC Carroll

#### Sound Recordists

Sean Poe

Martin Skork

Kieron Teather

©Nitrate London

#### Producers

Christine Langan

Jonty Claypole

Alan Yentob

#### In Colour and Black and White

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

BFI Films

11,506 ft +8 frames

Against a background of multilingual babble, we see scenes of London past and present: archive film from the height of Britain's empire, accompanied by music-hall songs, shows a teeming and growing city. The deprivation of the First World War is followed by a heady buzz, a wave of immigration and widespread poverty. Another war plunges London into darkness but also brings new freedoms. The collapse of empire ushers in youthful rebellion, further mass immigration and related discord. Poverty and homelessness rise as we move into the present, but with ever-increasing immigration the city's vibrant contrasts continue to proliferate.

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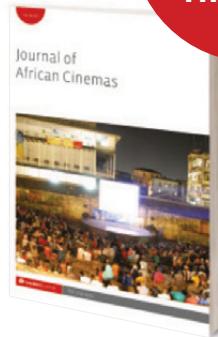
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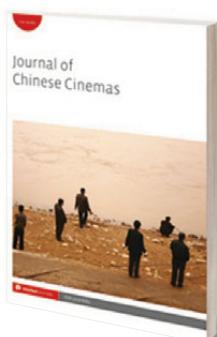
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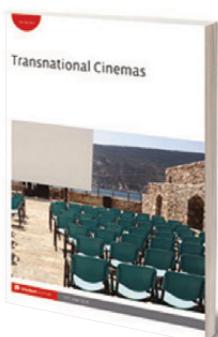
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University of Portsmouth  
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University of Portsmouth



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## The Myth of the American Sleepover

USA 2010  
Director: David Robert Mitchell  
Certificate 15 96m 17s

### Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Teen spirit has a very particular flavour in David Robert Mitchell's confident debut feature, a coming-of-age tale set one night in the Michigan suburbs just before the end of the summer holidays. Punkette Maggie, new girl in town Claudia, early-teen Rob and heartbroken twentysomething college student Scott spend the long summer night drifting through their respective sleepovers and parties in pursuit of one last thrill – or simply searching for someone to connect with.

Unlike *American Graffiti* and *Dazed and Confused* (films that *The Myth of the American Sleepover* makes deliberate reference to) Mitchell is clearly attempting something different and new within this familiar genre. And although he acknowledges being inspired by the pacing of European filmmakers, in particular François Truffaut, the mood and atmosphere are much closer to those of his compatriots Sofia Coppola (*The Virgin Suicides*), Gus Van Sant, and Ben Stiller (*Reality Bites*).

James Laxton's cinematography captures perfectly the greenish, ochre tones of summer's end, and the seasonal shift reflects the changes experienced by the characters: a storm near the end seems to wash off their adventures in readiness for their future. A hazy minimalism sets the narrative rhythm, somehow counteracting and undercutting a particularly teenage sense of anticipation as it lingers in the moment and on mundane details. There are no great revelations. And Mitchell's dialogue – far from the torrential mumbling that usually characterises the genre – is punctuated by silences accompanied by visual observations that lend a grounded realness to characters as well as locations.

But at the same time all this manages to feel completely unreal. This may of course be the very reason it succeeds as a faithful portrayal of that unsettling, awkward adolescent limbo when, filtered through hormonal drunkenness, things do look and feel different. Highlighting this sense of a parallel reality, there are no computers, DVDs or mobile phones, and not one adult; although more than one character spends the night drinking gigantic quantities of booze, they always look fresh (even after



**Flirt alert: Madi Ortiz, Marlon Morton**

quietly throwing up); and for all the talk of sex, what the film depicts is largely chaste.

The eager amateurism of a strong ensemble cast of unknowns further enhances the film's ethereal naturalism, and the overall feeling is low-key, subtly understated and timeless (although it could be set in the early 1990s). A permeating sense of mystery and discovery is given a disquieting edge by the presence of twentysomething college student Scott, probably more lost than any of his younger peers. His quasi-stalker search for the twins he had a crush on in high school (ideally he'd date them both) hints at that suburban mood of threat we've learned to call Lynchian.

The offbeat, dreamy quality of the film rings completely true as an encapsulation of adolescent bliss. And even though emotions are largely reined in and pensive rather than explosive, they effervesce under the surface, tinged by a purposeful yet vague sense of longing (each character is fuelled by curiosity, and lost for answers). It's therefore a surprise when all this is sacrificed for a tying of the threads that's a tad too neat, and all too positive. Although this does perhaps refer to the myth of the title – all those adolescent expectations (first kiss, first love, first drugs) were never quite how we'd hoped they'd be, nor were they how we'd like to remember them. ☺

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Adele Romanski  
**Written by**  
David Robert Mitchell  
**Cinematography**  
James Laxton  
**Edited by**  
Julio C. Perez IV  
**Production Designer**  
Jeanine A. Nicholas  
**Original Music**  
Kyle Newmaster  
**Sound Design**  
Zach Seivers  
J.M. Davey  
  
©Roman Spring Pictures, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Roman Spring Pictures presents  
Made with the

co-operation of the  
Screen Actors Guild  
A sponsored  
project of IFP  
  
**Cast**  
Claire Soma  
Maggie  
Marlon Morton  
Rob Salvati  
Amanda Bauer  
Claudia  
Brett Jacobsen  
Scott Holland  
Nikita Ramsey  
Ady Abbey  
Jade Ramsey  
Anna Abbey  
Annette DeNoyer  
Beth  
Wyatt McCallum  
Marcus

**Mary Wardell**  
Jen Holland  
**Doug Driedrich**  
Steven  
**Dane Jones**  
Emma  
**Shayla Curran**  
Janelle Ramsey  
**Madi Ortiz**  
Avaline Height  
  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
  
**Distributor**  
Independent  
Distribution  
  
**8,665 ft +8 frames**

**Michigan, the near past. On the last night of the summer holidays, a group of teenagers attend various sleepovers around suburban Detroit. Punkette Maggie and her best friend Beth bike to a seniors' party where Maggie flirts with the local pool's lifeguard. Rob, a high-school fresher, spends the night looking for a blonde he's seen at the supermarket. Heartbroken college student Scott searches for the just-graduated twins he had a crush on. Claudia, a new girl in town, manages to get invited to the cool girls' sleepover, only to discover her new boyfriend has flirted with one of them. Claudia takes her revenge, is kicked out of the party and breaks up with her boyfriend. Rob finds the blonde in a make-out maze, but ultimately ends up kissing a (girl) friend instead. Scott is turned down by the twins because he cannot choose between them. Maggie spends the night with the lifeguard but decides to hold off on their first kiss till another day. In the morning, Maggie and Beth perform at the city's street parade.**

## Now Is Good

United Kingdom/France 2012  
Director: Ol Parker  
Certificate 12A 103m 0s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

**Spoiler Alert**  
While arguably one of the most talented teen actors in Hollywood, Dakota Fanning is a surprising choice to star in this weepie – not because her character is dying of leukaemia, but because she is English. British teen colloquial intonation proves a particular challenge for the American actress, who sounds as if she hails from another era next to homegrown co-star Kaya Scodelario (*Wuthering Heights*).

It's a stumbling block for this interpretation of Jenny Downham's young adult novel *Before I Die*, but not a fatal one. Director and screenwriter Ol Parker retains the book's irreverent tone as he follows Fanning's character Tessa in her quest to live life to the full before her death, even if that means breaking the law – and possibly her father's heart. Spirited, humorous dialogue and rebellious party scenes mix with picturesque romantic strolls with handsome neighbour Adam (Jeremy Irvine) and hospital sequences that are unsettling, if not grim: in this way the

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Graham Broadbent  
Pete Czernin  
**Written by**  
Ol Parker  
Based on the book  
*Before I Die* by  
Jenny Downham  
**Director of Photography**  
Erik Alexander  
Wilson  
**Editor**  
Peter Lambert  
**Production Designer**  
Amanda McArthur  
**Music**  
Duston O'Halloran  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
John Hayes  
**Costume Designer**  
Suzie Harman

©Now Is Good Ltd,

BBC and the British

Film Institute

**Production Companies**

Warner Bros.

Pictures, BBC Films  
and BFI present in  
association with TF1  
Droits Audiovisuels  
and Rising Star  
Film a Blueprint  
Pictures production  
Made in association  
with Lipsync  
Productions LLP  
Made with the  
support of the  
National Lottery  
through the British  
Film Institute's  
Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Christine Langan  
Adam Kulick  
Peter Hampson

**Cast**

Dakota Fanning  
Tessa  
Jeremy Irvine  
Adam  
Paddy Considine  
dad  
Olivia Williams

mum  
**Kaya Scodelario**  
Zoey  
**Julian Wadham**  
Dr Ryan  
**Edgar Canham**  
Cal  
**Joe Cole**  
Scott  
**Julia Ford**  
Sally  
**Josef Altin**  
Jake  
**Rakie Ayola**  
Philippa  
**Tom Kane**  
Paul

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros  
Distributors (UK)

**9,270 ft +0 frames**

**Brighton, the present. Seventeen-year-old Tessa has terminal leukaemia and has decided not to continue with treatment, aiming to experience everything she believes a teenager should, including losing her virginity and taking drugs. Attempting to help her in this task is her party-loving friend Zoey. Tessa's parents are divorced: she lives with her father, who takes her to hospital appointments, but also spends time with her mother, a free spirit who prefers not to confront the realities of Tessa's condition. Tessa meets and falls for Adam, the boy next door, and initially keeps her condition a secret from him. When Tessa and Zoey experiment with drugs, Tessa runs into the woods and a worried Zoey tells Adam about her illness. Adam vows to stand by Tessa. Zoey falls pregnant and considers abortion but decides against it. Tessa and Adam begin to date but Tessa's health worsens. When she collapses before a date, Adam runs off in shock. Regretful, he leaves signs for her on her route home from hospital, and she forgives him. Adam starts staying over at Tessa's house, to the initial disapproval of her father. Adam is with her to the end and Tessa passes away happy that she has known love.**

## ParaNorman

USA 2012  
Directors: Sam Fell, Chris Butler  
Certificate PG 92m 36s



Riding high: Dakota Fanning, Jeremy Irvine

film strikes a note of positivity and acceptance amid the tragic circumstances of its protagonist.

*Now Is Good* doesn't dig too deep but it begins to explore the idea of a teenager having to deal with adult responsibilities. While Tessa must accept the ultimate grown-up reality – death – her friend Zoey faces unplanned parenthood. Each one's decision about her fate impacts on the other's, delivering a pro-life moral to the story when Zoey decides to keep her baby instead of having an abortion.

While superior, this shares a few faults with Parker's 2005 film *Imagine Me & You*, including abruptly edited scenes and underdeveloped plot points. The tone never settles, flitting between tragedy, comedy and romance without smoothing over the gaps. Scenes between the younger actors are also variable in terms of both direction and performances. Scodelario's character Zoey feels increasingly sidelined – a shame, since she is one of the film's most distinctive and authentic voices.

It's the scenes involving Tessa's estranged parents that strike the most confident tone. The moment when they put aside their differences for their child's sake could be the stuff of cliché but it's elevated by sensitive direction and terrific performances from Paddy Considine and Olivia Williams. Considine etches unspoken pain into his character's face, particularly when faced with impossible dilemmas (what if your teen daughter's dying wish was to have sex with her boyfriend under your own roof?).

The cancer comedy/drama will always be a hard sell and though *Now Is Good* doesn't achieve the delicate balance of last year's 50/50, it at least succeeds in being both fitfully amusing and ultimately moving, despite its flaws. ☀

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Following *Coraline* (2009), *ParaNorman* is another scary stop-motion film from Oregon studio Laika. Directed by Britain's Sam Fell and Chris Butler, it's ostensibly a zombie film, but after spending its first half setting us up for a *Living Dead*-style rampage it enjoys reversing those expectations, with the principal characters ending up besieged in a building not by zombies but by a live mob (though anyone who remembers the end of *Night of the Living Dead* will know that this is still honouring zombie-film tenets).

*ParaNorman's* visual sensibility smacks of *The Simpsons*, steering away from cuteness and making the modern world seem as grotesque as the horror. For all the money on screen, *ParaNorman* sometimes echoes the low-rent stop-motion TV show *Robot Chicken*.

*ParaNorman's* underlying story, though, is winsomely sweet-natured to the point of glibness. Eleven-year-old Norman sees ghosts all around town, and greets them shyly and respectfully, so of course his peers take him for a freak. Unfortunately, the support-the-outsider ethos is rather over-egged, and when Norman is called on to use his supernatural gifts to save the town from a witch's curse, the film – like *The Lorax* – takes a heavyhanded turn, drying up the scares and the comedy.

Up to this point, however, *ParaNorman* hits a confident, crowd-pleasing tone. The gags include a hilarious opening scene from a (very bad) zombie video nasty that Norman watches with his late granny; *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* are both referenced inside of a minute; and a ghost-in-a-toilet-cubicle set piece is presented with seat-rattling relish. ☀

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Arianne Sutner  
Travis Knight

#### Written by

Chris Butler

#### Director of

Photography

Tristan Oliver

#### Edited by

Christopher Murrie

#### Production

Designer

Nelson Lowry

#### Music

Jon Brion

#### Supervising

Sound Editor

Ronald Eng

#### Lead Animators

Travis Knight

Jeff Riley

Peyton Curtis

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#### Production Companies

Focus Features  
presents a Laika production

#### Voice Cast

Kodi Smit-McPhee

Norman Babcock

Tucker Albrizzi

Neil

Anna Kendrick

Courtney

Casey Affleck

Mitch

Christopher

Mintz-Plasse

Alvin

Leslie Mann

Sandra Babcock

Jeff Garlin

Perry Babcock

Elaine Stritch

Grandma

#### Bernard Hill

judge  
Jodelle Ferland  
Aggie  
Tempestt Bledsoe

Sheriff Hooper

Alex Borstein

Mrs Henscher

John Goodman

Mr Prenderghast

#### In Colour

[2:35:1]

#### Some screenings presented in 3D

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Ire

8,334 ft + frames

**Blithe Hollow, New England, the present.** Eleven-year-old Norman sees ghosts wherever he goes, and his schoolmates think he's a freak. When the town's 18th-century witch returns and raises the dead, Norman is called on to help. Chased by zombies, Norman is joined by his sister Courtney, his friend Neil, Neil's brother Mitch and dim-witted bully Alvin. Norman realises that the witch was an innocent girl, much like him, who was killed by the townsfolk because they feared her supernatural gifts. Norman's empathy calms her, and her spirit rests in peace. Her curse broken, the zombies vanish.

## The Perks of Being a Wallflower

USA 2012,  
Director: Stephen Chbosky, Certificate 12A 102m 32s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The stars of *Harry Potter* did a deal with the devil when they won their roles: fame and fortune in return for a lifetime spent trying to perform the vanishing spell on their wizarding past. Daniel Radcliffe pulled off a neat trick by getting himself cast in *The Woman in Black*, which not only proved to be a massive hit but also allowed him to play a grieving widower and father rather than yet another angsty youngster. No such luck for Emma Watson, whose first post-Hogwarts starring role pitches her straight back into the classroom. The main act of transfiguration she achieves in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* involves a few sexy outfits and an American accent, both of which she carries off well enough, but unfortunately the film itself is a strictly by-numbers clatter down the usual high-school corridors.

Watson is Sam, a final-year student too cool and pretty to care about being popular – especially since she can team up with her equally cool and witty gay stepbrother Patrick (Ezra Miller) to lead their own clique of outsider insiders. Taking pity on the film's narrator, the shy first-year Charlie (Logan Lerman), they lend him their Anglophilic music tastes (Bowie, Smiths), devise a fashion signature for him, and let him experiment with drugs and sex under their gentle guidance. So far, so cosy, but there's always a dark undertow to these coming-of-age fairytales, and so Charlie is given a history of mental-health problems that will have to be resolved before the credits roll. And that's not all: leaving no teen-hell pudding underegged, we'll tick several more agony boxes along the way, including homophobic bullying, partner abuse and suicide; plus there's a troublingly throwaway reference to bulimia, from which Sam supposedly suffers. The sanity-threatening elephant in Charlie's room is referred to via oblique flashbacks for most of the film, but when the big reveal comes it is oddly bathetic in the context of such a maelstrom of psycho-toxic happenings; as each traumatic incident is laughed off or fixed with the all-purpose anaesthetic of British post-punk, it becomes impossible to feel any pain. Since Stephen Chbosky wrote the successful source novel, adapted it and then directed it himself, it's a safe bet that, in other hands, some of the issues and themes he couldn't bear to leave out might have been firmly excised for the sake of clarity and coherence.



Linking feeling: Logan Lerman, Emma Watson

Despite this overstuffing, the film does some things well: the three leads easily outclass their material, especially the always watchable Miller; and minor characters such as Charlie's first, tragically unsuitable girlfriend Mary Elizabeth (Mae Whitman) are subtly drawn. The depiction of the feverish exchange of cultural currency among the young – the meticulously curated mixtapes, the minutely calibrated register of hip bands, books and films – is vividly realised. But the moral assumptions at the heart of the film are, finally, quite frightening. The most rancid of clichés – the wimp who suddenly gets respect from his peers through an act of savage violence – is central to the plot and is presented as a successful social gambit, one that can be readily excused given enough provocation and an otherwise delicate sensibility. More insidiously, the very premise suggested by the title – that being an introvert is not all bad – is betrayed by a plot which aims relentlessly to reabsorb Charlie into the enforced jollity of the mainstream by reframing his scepticism as part of his mental illness. Once he's been cured of that silly wallflower business and learned to join in, he'll feel much better, apparently. You can't help feeling that he'd be better off sticking to *The Smiths*. Or, come to that, watching *Heathers*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Lianne Halfon  
Russell Smith  
John Malkovich  
**Screenplay by**  
Stephen Chbosky  
based on his book  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Dunn  
**Editor**  
Mary Jo Markey  
**Production Designer**  
Inbal Weinberg  
**Music**  
Michael Brook  
**Sound Mixer**  
Jeffrey Bloomer  
**Costume Designer**  
David C. Robinson

©Summit Entertainment, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Summit Entertainment presents a Mr. Mudd production  
**Executive Producers**  
James Powers  
Stephen Chbosky

**Cast**  
Logan Lerman  
Charlie  
Emma Watson  
Sam  
Ezra Miller  
Patrick

**Ma Whitman**  
Mary Elizabeth  
**Kate Walsh**  
mother  
**Dylan McDermott**  
father  
**Joan Cusack**  
psychiatrist  
**Paul Rudd**  
Bill  
**Johnny Simmons**  
Brad

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
E1 Films

**9,228 ft +0 frames**

**Pennsylvania, the early 1990s.** Charlie is a lonely teenager starting high school. He's recovering from mental-health problems triggered by his best friend's suicide, and he's painfully shy. However, he's impressed by a group of confident, rebellious final-year students and plucks up the courage to befriend them, starting with camp show-off Patrick and his pretty stepsister Sam. These two introduce him to a world of music, drugs and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and help him forge an identity for himself. A kindly English teacher guides him through the literature of Kerouac and Salinger.

Charlie starts dating one of the group, Mary Elizabeth, but can't hide his feelings for Sam, and this leads to a rift. He is thrown out of their circle, but when he hears that Patrick has been discovered in bed with Brad, his firmly closeted gay lover, and witnesses him being bullied by Brad's football-team friends, Charlie launches himself into a fight which he wins decisively. This gains him respect and wins back his friends, but when Sam appears to return his feelings, only to abandon him by leaving for college, Charlie has a breakdown. In therapy, he finally confronts previously suppressed memories of childhood abuse. He returns to school determined to overcome his shyness and participate in life.

## Premium Rush

USA 2012  
Director: David Koepp  
Certificate 12A 90m 50s

### Reviewed by Paul Julian Smith

Although its hero's mantra is 'Can't stop, won't stop', *Premium Rush*, a frenetic bike-messenger movie, feels strangely slow. Proving that two-wheeled chases can be quite as dull as the four-wheeled variety, in spite of the fact that his film relies more on perilous physical stunts shot on city streets than digital effects, director David Koepp (a writer with a lengthy curriculum in action movies) resorts to constant gimmicks in plotting and shooting to jazz up an outdated concept. Thus barely has likeable Joseph Gordon-Levitt crashed his bike into a taxi than we are jerked back into a series of explanatory flashbacks. *CSI*-style re-enactments show the multiple mayhem of his character Wilee's possible routes, weaving through midtown traffic. And the camera constantly cuts up to chart his path through a curiously unconvincing model of Manhattan. In spite of this busyness, surely no film so firmly anchored in a real location (addresses flash up on screen) has felt so disconnected from the city it claims to chronicle. Although the topic of cycling is of the moment (New York is about to begin cycle hire scheme), the city is now famously the safest in the US. But New York here is a nightmare of violent cops, smoke-filled gambling dens and chaotic traffic. And, worst of all, the histrionically sinister Chinese in *Premium Rush* hark all the way back to *Fu Manchu*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Gavin Polone  
**Written by**  
David Koepp  
John Kampf  
**Director of Photography**  
Mitchell Amundsen  
**Edited by**  
Jill Savitt  
Derek Ambrosi  
**Production Designer**  
Thérèse DePrez  
**Music**  
David Sardy  
**Production Mixer**  
Tom Nelson  
**Costume Designer**  
Luca Mosca

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**New York, the present.** Wilee, a daredevil bike messenger, crashes into the back of a taxi. In flashback we see the events that have led up to this accident. Hours before, Wilee picks up a package from Columbia University to take to an address in Chinatown. The sender is Nima, the Chinese flatmate of Wilee's estranged girlfriend Vanessa. Bobby, a corrupt cop, tries to intercept the package and pursues Wilee downtown in his car. In flashback once more we learn that the package contains a ticket which, when exchanged for cash, will enable Nima's child to emigrate from China to the US. Bobby, we learn, is a gambling addict who needs the money to pay off his debts. He has killed a Chinese thug who has come to collect. Finally Wilee delivers the ticket to its destination and Bobby is killed in retribution.

## [Rec]<sup>3</sup> Genesis

Spain 2011  
Director: Paco Plaza  
Certificate 18 80m 28s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The first 20 minutes of *[REC]<sup>3</sup> Génisis* (one of the longest pre-credits sequences in horror history) are in the by now familiar style of Paco Plaza and Jaume Balagueró's *[REC]* and *[REC]<sup>2</sup>* (not to mention the American remake, *Quarantine*). A lavish wedding and reception are chronicled by an official cinematographer (who namechecks Dziga Vertov when philosophising about wedding videos) and a guest with much less elaborate video equipment. The happy social occasion collapses when the demonic infection from the earlier films (whose stories run concurrently with this) reaches the reception, and most of the guests turn into frothing, vicious, zombie-like creatures out to rend or infect their fellows. When a few survivors are temporarily holed up in a kitchen, bridegroom Koldo (Diego Martín) turns on the compulsive videographers (who have equivalent characters in everything from *Cannibal Holocaust* to *Cloverfield*) and asks the question that audiences grown tired of the found-footage cycle have long pondered: why would anyone continue filming in such distressing and dangerous circumstances? Then Koldo takes away the camera and kicks it to pieces – whereupon the film reframes itself in widescreen and adopts a more conventional, objective filming style, allowing for a polished, professional 'proper horror' manner.

Given that the earlier films and many similar items have exhausted a once cutting-edge approach, this third entry risks alienating longtime fans by taking a different direction. Furthermore, it gets away from straight-on suspense-horror to essay the more comical style of the *Evil Dead* movies, with slender, lovely bride Clara (Leticia Dolera) abbreviating her wedding dress with a chainsaw in order to fight her way unencumbered through hordes of zombies and a run of oddly inspired gags (the hard-of-hearing zombie unaffected by the recitation that immobilises his fellows). The scrappy, demon-monster infestation that turns well-dressed guests into acrobatic hags

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Julio Fernández  
**Written by**  
Luis Berdejo  
Paco Plaza  
**Story**  
Luis Berdejo  
Paco Plaza  
David Gallart  
**Director of Photography**  
Pablo Rosso  
**Editor**  
David Gallart  
**Art Director**  
Gemma Fauria  
**Music**  
Mikel Salas  
**Sound Designer**  
Gabriel Gutiérrez

©Rec Genesis A.I.E.  
**Production Companies**  
Filmmax with the participation of TVE, Ono, Canal+ In collaboration with Televisió de

Catalunya S.A.,  
l'Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals  
With the support of Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales  
**Executive Producers**  
Julio Fernández  
Carlos Fernández  
Alberto Marini

**Cast**  
Leticia Dolera  
Clara  
Diego Martín  
Koldo  
Alex Monner  
Adrián  
Ismael Martínez  
Rafa  
Sr. B.  
Atún  
**Emilio Mencheta**  
Uncle Pepe Victor  
**David Ramírez**  
Canon

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
**[2.35:1]**  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
E1 Films

**7,242 ft +0 frames**

Spanish  
theatrical title  
**[Rec 3] Génesis**

## Shut Up and Play the Hits

United Kingdom 2012  
Directors: Dylan Southern, Will Lovelace  
Certificate 15 108m 7s



Blood wedding: Leticia Dolera

and slobbering ghouls (Emilio Mencheta is especially effective as the cherubic patient zero of this outbreak, who retains his sly smile even after his transformation) brings to mind Lamberto Bava's *Demons* pictures, but Plaza (directing solo this time, though Balagueró is due to deliver his own series entry later) also evokes such Spanish precedents as Amando de Ossorio's *Blind Dead* movies and Jorge Grau's *The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue*, which mix religious and mad-science themes into zombie scenarios and blend monster attacks with odd moments of surreal beauty.

A frequent problem with contemporary horror (especially in the found-footage cycle) is a want of feeling, as moments of cruelty are staged as distancing spectacles that invite us to jeer at the unfortunate rather than empathise. Here, spirited work from Dolera (without the script making a fuss of it, she remembers that the monsters were her friends and family only minutes before) and Martín as the newlyweds gives the film heart. It's a strong emotional connection that pays off even beyond the characters' transformations, with a *Bonnie and Clyde*-style *Liebestod* as the zombified couple are riddled with bullets but reach out for each other in death. **S**

**Madrid, the present.** Following the marriage of a young couple, Koldo and Clara, their extended families and a large number of guests gather at a palace that has been rented for the reception. Pepe Victor, Koldo's uncle, is a vet who has been bitten by a dog in the grip of a demonic infection that's on the point of breaking out in another part of the city. Pepe Victor bites people and the infection/possession spreads rapidly through the wedding party as the authorities seal off the site. Koldo and Clara are separated in the panic. Koldo puts on medieval armour from a shrine to St George and searches for Clara in the chaos, while Clara hauls best man Rafa into tunnels, determined to find her husband. Koldo's allies are killed or infected and Clara has to mercy-kill Rafa with a chainsaw when he is bitten. A priest discovers that reading from the Bible paralyses the possessed, and recites scripture over the PA system, immobilising the monsters. Koldo and Clara find each other but Koldo's grandfather – who is deaf and can't hear the scripture – bites Clara on the hand. She cuts off her own hand but the possession spreads. Koldo carries Clara outside and is surrounded by the authorities. When they demand that he let them kill her, Koldo kisses Clara and takes the infection on himself. Koldo and Clara are gunned down.

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

In February 2011 New York group LCD Soundsystem announced their retirement, and that April played a three-hour farewell concert at Madison Square Garden. *Shut Up and Play the Hits* combines performances from that night with extensive footage of the band (and above all their writer, producer, singer and all-round mastermind James Murphy) in the 48 hours around this curtain call. LCD seemed to be at their zenith: both popular and critically adored, especially in the US, where music website Pitchfork regarded them as one of the defining groups of the 2000s. So why break up? *Shut Up...* is as much a meditation on, or rather an apologia for, walking away as a concert film.

LCD Soundsystem have always been haunted by the sense of an ending. On their 2002 debut release 'Losing My Edge', Murphy voiced the increasingly panicked interior monologue of an ageing music-scene hipster being left behind by younger, hipper, smarter kids. Their best songs by far, 'Someone Great' and 'All My Friends', are about loss and aftermath. And even Murphy's choice of directors for this project waxes retrospective: Dylan Southern and Will Lovelace have just one previous credit, *No Distance Left to Run*, which documented Blur's 2009 reunion tour and recapped their career.

Southern and Lovelace set the valedictory vibe from the opening titles, which start at the end: the lights have come up and a bird's-eye view shows LCD's stage set-up being dismantled piece by piece. The live material is well caught: Southern and Lovelace almost disregard the Garden's scale as a venue and a spectacle, avoiding sweeping wide shots to get instead among the performers for a multitude of handheld angles. The fans are shot not as a sea of faces but in small vignettes capturing little pockets of friends. The band fizz and fulminate through tracks like 'Dance Yrself Clean' and their cover of Harry Nilsson's 'Jump into the Fire', immaculately drilled but demob happy. Separating the songs are *vérité* sequences focused on Murphy: waking up the morning after the gig, making coffee, walking his dog and tying up the group's loose ends. The effect is interesting, with the flow of the performance curdled by its after-effects, like a party shot through with flashforwards or premonitions of an imminent hangover.

Murphy's achievement with LCD Soundsystem was essentially to reintroduce the awkward wallflower that is indie rock to the polymorphous pleasures of dancing, weaving in disco, electro and funk, much as Talking Heads did 30 years ago. *Shut Up...* slightly troubles that image: LCD live is, quite obviously, a rock show rather than a dance party, with fans facing forwards, arms raised, feet fixed. And LCD's utilitarian approach to on-stage spectacle stretches the Talking Heads comparison: in contrast to the extravagant ideas of David Byrne on display in Jonathan Demme's *Stop Making Sense* (1984), LCD simply coordinate in white clothes and accessorise that banks of blinding white lighting.

Whether James Murphy, and his vehicle LCD, suffer from a failure of imagination or of nerve



Richer sounds: James Murphy

becomes the real question asked by the film-within-a-film that shadows the concert footage. Music writer Chuck Klosterman asks what the group's biggest failing might be: Murphy suggests it could be that they're breaking up – which sounds like purest hubris until he elaborates that the retirement may be a form of cowardice. Klosterman also suggests – acutely – that Murphy suffers from an "inability to stop being self-conscious". It's a point that resonates through the film. Take all the fly-on-the-wall shots of Murphy moving groggily around his flat the morning after, or exiting his apartment building to walk his pug: the camera doesn't follow him, it's already there in position.

Does it matter that if you scratch the surface, *Shut Up...* is unobtrusively staged? Not, of course, in the sense that it's fake, which would rightly never trouble one of Murphy's heroes, David Bowie. It's that the simulation is in the service of looking 'real' and unvarnished, rather than creating some weird extravagant fiction. So *Shut Up...* records instead the quotidian texture of 'lifestyle'. It captures Murphy's retro alarm clock, his enviable record collection, his coffee connoisseurship. It's a display of good taste, just as LCD's music was a catalogue of excellent taste in musical references. It's a goodbye letter addressed not so much to the fans as read out into a mirror – at one point the sound of Murphy being interviewed is laid over an extended shot of him gazing into his own face as he shaves. Which is perhaps more telling about the 2000s zeitgeist than Pitchfork may realise. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Lucas Ochoa  
Thomas Benski  
James Murphy  
**Director of Photography**  
Reed Morano  
**Edited by**  
Mark Burnett  
**Sound Mixer**  
Jesse Flower-

Ambroch  
©Pulse Films  
**Production Companies**  
A Pulse Films production of a film by Dylan Southern and Will Lovelace  
**Executive Producers**

Christine Vachon  
Keith Wood  
The Creators Project  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Distributor**  
Pulse  
9,730 ft +8 frames

**A documentary about the final 48 hours and farewell concert of New York group LCD Soundsystem. Performances from the Madison Square Garden show are intercut with backstage footage and scenes of LCD Soundsystem's founder, James Murphy, in conversation with journalists and with his manager as he makes the final arrangements for the band's retirement.**

# The Snows of Kilimanjaro

France 2011  
Director: Robert Guédiguian



**Melting-point:** Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Ariane Ascaride

**Reviewed by Jonathan Romney**

**Spoiler Alert**

Despite the title, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* is nothing to do with Ernest Hemingway – who no doubt would have thought the film a terrible example of bleeding-heart sentimentality. In fact, the reference is to the Tanzanian holiday that middle-aged Marseillais couple Michel and Marie-Claire fail to take; 'Kilimandjaro' is also the name of a 1960s French pop ballad about old age and approaching death.

But sentimentality as such? That's certainly a trait that director Robert Guédiguian has flirted with in the past, as do his characters here – although it's a tendency for which they often have to tell themselves off and are also rebuked by others. Fondness and nostalgia are certainly key traits in the Guédiguian universe. In Britain, the director is best known for the anomalous political drama *The Last Mitterrand* (2005), but his defining work is his continuing Marseilles cycle, including several films (notably *Marius and Jeanette*) based in the working-class district of L'Estaque. Guédiguian's regular players Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Ariane Ascaride and

Gérard Meylan command great affection in France as likeable no-nonsense incarnations of the traditional working-class spirit; here, Darroussin's union rep Michel embodies the unbowed compassion of an old French left that could all too easily be dismissed as archaic.

Doing the decent thing is hardwired in Michel; although he's not obliged to do so, it's unthinkable for him not to show solidarity with the workforce by including his name in the lottery for job losses when redundancies are called for. It's a gesture that is easily misinterpreted: his workmate and brother-in-law Raoul sees it as pointless self-sacrifice, while the gesture of accepting layoffs now to avoid more in future is seen by young worker Christophe as a pitiful compromise.

Nevertheless, what is essential to the likes of Michel and Marie-Claire – and implicitly, to the long-term faithful in Guédiguian's French audience – are the qualities of self-respect and dignity. They believe in keeping the socialist flame alive in compromised times, and central to their belief is the importance of self-criticism; sitting on his rooftop terrace, Michel imagines

himself and Marie-Claire at 20, looking up and seeing themselves as a complacent pair of petits bourgeois. Their battles, Michel muses, are already fought, while new generations (Christophe's) must fight far harder battles, the deck much more severely stacked against them.

Indeed, Christophe challenges all that Michel stands for, addressing him with utter contempt when Michel confronts him in an interrogation cell after the younger man has been arrested for stealing Michel and Marie-Claire's holiday cash. It's a clever rhetorical strategy on Guédiguian's part. First he makes Christophe sympathetic by showing us the struggles of his existence: two dependent brothers, no father, an absentee mother, a likeable young neighbour whom he hopes to date, and a more ruthless partner-in-crime apparently manipulating him. Guédiguian manoeuvres us towards the same sentimental sympathy that Michel feels for the young man – only for us to have our liberal sentiments thrown back in our faces by Christophe, who refuses to be 'understood' by a generation whose values he rejects as soft, complacent liberalism. That's why Michel ends up taking a swipe at Christophe – just when Marie-Claire has proudly announced that he would never take revenge by hitting the man who wronged him, even when implicitly invited to by the police.

By the end of the film, the thoroughly beleaguered couple will have searched their hearts, turned the other cheek and done the best for their aggressor's family – sacrificing their dream holiday. We may feel inclined to feel a warm approving glow – but Guédiguian also leaves us with a dissenting view from the couple's adult children, who think their parents are crazy (and neglectful of their own grandchildren) for taking this decision. It's just as well that the film has this dialectical component, given that Guédiguian is otherwise a little too inclined to steer us emotionally; he has a particular fondness for pathos on the soundtrack, with both Ravel and Jimmy Cliff milked shamelessly throughout. Overall, however, the film is more levelheaded than one might expect, given its source in one of Victor Hugo's more mawkish narrative poems, 'Les pauvres gens', a story of selfless adoption.

Without doubt *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* is knowingly melodramatic and contrived, and at moments falls prey to Guédiguian's tendency to indulge his actors in showcase turns. Once again the flaws in a Guédiguian film are cemented over by the likeability and manifestly strong camaraderie of his 'family' of actors, especially Ascaride (incarnating bighearted Marseillais working-class indomitability) and the weatherbeaten duo of Meylan and the ever-hangdog (and often extremely droll) Darroussin. The film might well be suspected of flattering the self-image of a certain section of its audience, but its old-school articulate socialism is a rare voice in current French cinema. It's good to see Guédiguian's bullish convictions persisting still with a warmth and toughness that are very much against the contemporary grain; they make for a film that is more intelligent and rather less cosy than it appears. S

## Credits and Synopsis

### Written by

Jean-Louis Milesi  
Robert Guédiguian

### Director of Photography

Pierre Milon

### Supervising Editor

Bernard Sasia

### Supervising Art Director

Michel Vandestien

### Sound Engineer

Laurent Lafraan

### Supervising

### Costume Designer

Juliette Chanaud

### Production Companies

©Agat Films & Cie,  
France 3 Cinéma

### Companies

Agat Films & Cie presents an

### Art Director

France 3 Cinéma

### co-production

With the participation of

Canal+,

CinéCinéma, France

Télévisions

In association

with Cinéimage 5,

Banque Postale

Image 4, Soficinéma

7, Cotimage 22

With the support of

Région Provence

Alpes Côte d'Azur

In partnership with

Centre National

du Cinéma et de

l'Image Animée

### Cast

Ariane Ascaride

Marie-Claire

Jean-Pierre

Darroussin

Michel

Gérard Meylan

Raoul

Grégoire

Leprince-Ringuet

Christophe

Maryline Canto

Denise

Anaïs Demoustier

Flo

Adrien Jolivet

Gilles

Robinson Stevenin

commissioner

Karole Rocher

Christopher's mother

Julie-Marie

Parmentier

Agnès

Pierre Niney

barman

Yann Loubatiere

Jules

Dolby Digital/DTS

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Cinéfile

French theatrical title

Les Neiges du

Kilimandjaro

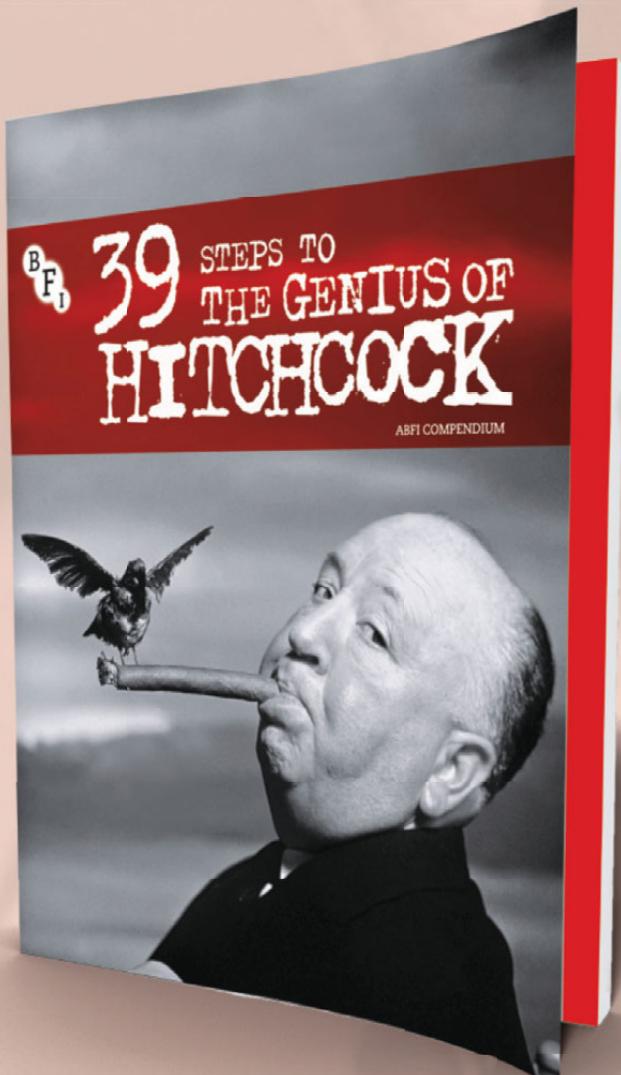
**Marseilles, the present.** Union representative Michel, a committed socialist, becomes unemployed when he includes his own name in a lottery for redundancies. For their 20th wedding anniversary, he and wife Marie-Claire are given tickets for a holiday in Tanzania, plus a large sum of money. Soon afterwards, the gift is stolen by two robbers who menace the couple, along with Marie-Claire's sister Denise and her husband Raoul, Michel's workmate. Michel discovers

that one of the robbers is Christophe, a young worker who was among those laid off. After his arrest, the young man is defiant towards Michel. But Michel learns that Christophe needed money to look after his two younger brothers. Michel and Marie-Claire separately try to help the two boys and – despite opposition from their family – together decide to take them into their home while Christophe is in prison.

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## Sound of My Voice

USA 2012  
Director: Zal Batmanglij  
Certificate 15 85m 8s

### Reviewed by Carmen Gray

*Sound of My Voice* is the second of two US indie releases screened at Sundance last year co-written by and starring newcomer Brit Marling. Just as her more affecting but equally unfocused *Another Earth* did, it attempts a haunting take on psychological trauma within a minimalist sci-fi premise.

The debut feature of director Zal Batmanglij, *Sound of My Voice* is divided into ten numbered chapters and feels choppy episodic. It sees young LA couple Peter (Christopher Denham) and Lorna (Nicole Vicius) attempt to make a documentary exposing the cult they've infiltrated. Blindfolded and driven to a suburban valley basement, they hand in their possessions, shower and don hospital-style robes, ready for their initiation. The increasing lengths required to gain and retain sect admittance are what drive the film's unease, as opposed to the infinitely more chilling cult indoctrination drama *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (2011), in which escape prompts terrorisation.

From a laughably elaborate secret handshake to the grand entrance of young leader Maggie (Marling), with veiled face and trailing an oxygen tank, it's hard to credit the cult's mesmerising allure. A creaky script and low-budget production values do little to help. Maggie claims to be from the year 2054, and as she sketchily describes a future reeling from civil war in which a remake of a Cranberries song defines popular music, cynical schoolteacher Peter initially mirrors our wry scepticism. But, haunted by parental abandonment, he soon proves more vulnerable than his ex-addict girlfriend. What's more, in their ambitions for filmmaking success, they are as complicit with Maggie's parasitic fraudulence as they are intent on unmasking it for authenticity's sake.

Echoing Los Angeles's cult of celebrity, blonde Maggie has the outward beauty of a starlet. Being



**Clubbed: Nicole Vicius, Christopher Denham**

from the future doesn't mean that she's a saint, she declares, as she lights up a cigarette – but tension over whether she's more Manson or messiah is dissipated with the early revelation that, either way, she's a nasty piece of work. She draws initiates in with a warmly effusive welcome that makes them feel part of her privileged club, only to verbally demean and manipulate them with the spectre of rejection. While the cult's practices aren't overtly sexual, control over bodies is total. When Peter refuses to vomit during a purging ritual, Maggie zeroes in on his childhood insecurities to bully him into breaking down. This precipitates a crisis in Peter's relationship with Lorna, who's jealous of his 'emotional orgasm' and suspicious of his growing need for Maggie's approval.

This psychological triangle promises much, only to fizz out infuriatingly. Unlike the challenging suggestion in *Martha Marcy May Marlene* that cults and families are in their socialisation practices merely two sides of the same coin, *Sound of My Voice* reins back to much shallower thriller territory, and fails to ramp up its atmosphere to anything more sinister than vague disquiet, conjuring a final twist with little revelatory bite. ☀

## The Sweeney

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Nick Love  
Certificate 15 112m 23s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

**See  
The Industry  
on page 18**

Like Marmite and the Mini, TV cop show *The Sweeney* occupies a particular sweet spot among British cultural icons. In four series and two feature films between 1975 and 1978, its jaundiced and lively banter, pacy action sequences and gritty storylines swept away the cosy *Dixon of Dock Green* ethos of previous police series like a Ford Consul crashing through a pile of cardboard boxes. So beloved is it that it has become a TV trope, a 70s conglomeration of a shouting detective inspector, kipper ties, screeching car chases and cocky catchphrases. It's instantly recognisable, whether in a 1997 spoof Nissan Almera advertisement or conjured by *Life on Mars*'s tongue-in-cheek caricature Gene Hunt.

There's little of this knowingness, however, in director/co-writer Nick Love's glossily generic big-screen update. Tone deaf, it ignores the original's wit, realism and vitality, while retaining the macho posturing and perfunctory cops-and-robbers plotting that formed its less attractive side. Forget the lock-ups, lock-ins and seedy settings of the TV show, now dropped in favour of DP Simon Dennis's desaturated steely blue London, all aerial landmark shots and glass-walled City offices that resemble an internet start-up rather than a police HQ. This is *The Sweeney* seen strictly through Love's lens, one as thematically preoccupied with violence, male bonding and tribalism as his odes to hooliganism and organised crime *The Football Factory* (2004) and *The Business* (2005). The Flying Squad circa 2012 are less a professional police unit than a gang, much given to carousing and speeding off mob-handed to rough up cockney lowlives or battle Balkan armed robbers. Who's the daddy? Why, DI Jack Regan, hero-worshipped by his young colleagues and played with grizzled, eye-catching menace by Ray Winstone as the Falstaff of the Flying Squad.

The film nakedly fetishises the Sweeney as hallowed hard-cases – just as Regan's sidekick, the bad-boy-turned-good-cop George Carter does: "I became police to be in the Sweeney. If there is no Sweeney, there is no PC George Carter." Routine police work and chewier questions of ethics or justice are blithely ignored, and Regan's preferred methods of intimidating witnesses, bribing his informer with pilfered bullion and violently assaulting both his chief suspect and a hated colleague are painted so luridly as to strain credibility. Even in an era where maverick cops are ubiquitous in crime dramas, Winstone's hero looks less like a *Bad Lieutenant*-style character conundrum than a one-dimensional bully with a badge.

Regan's brawling, bawling ways are set against the spineless box-ticking of his internal-affairs nemesis Ivan Lewis (a splendidly weaselly Steven Mackintosh), a desk-jockey the film spends so much time despising for his lack of lairy masculinity that he becomes the story's alternative villain, a red-tape superego threatening Regan's unbridled id. He's in much clearer focus than the film's actual villain, the deadpan robbery mastermind Francis Allen (Paul Anderson, giving the film's only nuanced

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Hans Ritter  
Brit Marling  
Shelley Surpin

#### Written by

Zal Batmanglij  
Brit Marling

#### Cinematography

Rachel Morrison

#### Edited by

Tamara Meem

#### Production Designer

Scott Engle

#### Music

Rostam Batmanglij

#### Production Sound Mixer

Josh Bissett  
Costume Designer

Sarah De Sa Rego

#### Production Companies

Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with 1737 Films/Skyscraper. This film was made possible in part with support from The Sundance Institute/Annenberg Feature Film Fellowship.

#### English-speaking territory)

#### Production Companies

Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with 1737 Films/Skyscraper. This film was made possible in part with support from The Sundance Institute/Annenberg Feature Film Fellowship.

#### Executive Producers

Eric Richter  
Victoria Guenier

#### Cast

**Christopher Denham**  
Peter Aitken  
**Nicole Vicius**  
Lorna Michaelson  
**Brit Marling**  
Maggie  
**Davenia McCadden**  
Carol Briggs

#### Kandise Stroh

Joanne  
**Richard Wharton**  
Klaus

#### Christy Meyers

Mel  
**Alvin Lam**  
Lam  
**Constance Wu**  
Christine  
**Matthew Carey**  
Lyle  
**Jacob Price**  
PJ

#### David Haley

O'Shea  
**Avery Pohl**  
Abigail Pritchett  
**Dolby Digital/**  
**Datasat/SDDS**  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

7,662 ft +0 frames

**Los Angeles, present day. Schoolteacher Peter and his girlfriend Lorna have infiltrated a cult. They aim to launch filmmaking careers by making a documentary exposing the cult's young leader Maggie – who claims to be from the year 2054 – as a con artist. Confining herself to a basement, Maggie eats only homegrown food, citing allergies to this era's produce. She warns initiates that their tasks will become progressively harder. Peter swallows a tiny camera to smuggle it in; fearing that it will be revealed in a purging ritual, he refuses to vomit, and Maggie verbally demeans him. He breaks down, admitting his self-doubt, and vomits, hiding the camera. Asked for a song from the future, Maggie sings a 1990s hit; confronted, she says it must be a remake. When follower Lam requests solid proof,**

**she expels him. Maggie asks Peter to bring her his eight-year-old student Abigail Pritchett, claiming that she is her future mother and threatening to expel him if he refuses. A subplot has shown a male caregiver injecting the sickly girl. Lorna, incredulous that Peter is considering the proposition, accuses him of desiring Maggie. They break up. A federal agent, on Maggie's tail for previous crimes, persuades Lorna to cooperate. Reconciling with Peter, she suggests that he arrange a meeting between Abigail and Maggie during a school trip. They meet at the designated location. Peter is shocked to see that Abigail knows the cult's secret handshake – which Maggie says Abigail taught her. The police raid and arrest Maggie. The cult declares Peter a traitor.**

## To Rome with Love

USA Year  
Director: Woody Allen  
Certificate 12A 111m 40s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"What better place than Rome in which to await *the end of the world*?" the expatriate author Gore Vidal proclaimed of his adopted home in *Fellini's Roma* (1972). The world outlasted the author of *Julian* and uncredited contributor to the *Ben-Hur* screenplay, who passed away in July in the Hollywood Hills. Fellini, who at the time of 1960's *La dolce vita* might have held a reasonable claim to being the most famous artist in the world, full stop, died in 1993. Of the relics who remain to testify to a somewhat more cerebral era in western public life, Woody Allen, belonging to the younger-brother generation to these men, endures. Court jester of the high public-intellectual era, Allen, like Vidal, shared a TV studio stage with William F. Buckley, and, raised in reverence to arthouse gods of the 1950s such as Fellini, the onetime light comedian emerged in the late 1970s as a sort of synthetic auteur, replaying his idols' narratives through his own sensibility.

When not returning to the well of Ingmar Bergman, Allen reworked much of Fellini's filmography towards his own ends: *8½* as *Stardust Memories*, *Juliet of the Spirits* as Alice, *La dolce vita* as *Celebrity* and *La strada* as *Sweet and Lowdown*. It should follow that *To Rome with Love* would be *Allen's Roma*, but more recently Woody has been playing a game of follow-the-funding through the tourist boards of Europe's capitals, plugging his little stories into London, Barcelona and Paris, and now landing at the foot of the Spanish Steps.

In *To Rome with Love* Allen has written himself his first acting role since 2006's *Scoop*; he and Judy Davis are Jerry and Phyllis, the parents of Alison Pill's American girl abroad, Hayley, come to meet their daughter's Italian fiancé. At 76, Allen's line readings have lost some of their anxious snap and, resistant to the limitations imposed by his ageing in a way that, say, fellow 1960s icon Clint Eastwood has not been, Allen hasn't been nearly so successful in gracefully greying his iconic image over the passage of time. It doesn't help that here Allen features himself in a storyline which stretches out a not-very-promising skit about Jerry's discovery of a powerful soprano who can only perform in the shower, a dull variation on the Looney Tunes cartoon 'One Froggy Evening' without a fraction of that seven-minute film's densely packed humour and pathos.

"You equate retirement with death," psychoanalyst Phyllis taunts her reluctantly superannuated husband, unmistakably addressing the one-a-year filmmaker who has made his horror of the void the running joke of his career. Later, when Jerry claims that he's immune to analysis because he lacks the usual id, ego and superego set-up, Phyllis snaps that he has three ids. In *To Rome with Love*, Allen has at least as many alter egos scattered throughout the film's rotating, unconnected plotlines.

In one meandering section, Roberto Benigni plays a humble Roman bourgeois who wakes one day to find himself famous, just as inexplicably as Gregor Samsa woke to find himself an insect – here we may divine the pleased befuddlement of Woody, once Allen Konigsberg of Brooklyn, at having



**The unprofessionals:** Ray Winstone, Hayley Atwell, Allen Leech, Ben Drew

performance in his slivers of story). Or even Ben 'Plan B' Drew's Carter, whose flat delivery and effortful nonchalance are overwhelmed by Winstone's growling and showboating. The combination produces a faintly troubled father-son vibe rather than an equal, bantering partnership, despite the film's leaden, laddish dialogue. This is the kind of film where silently mouthing "What a c\*\*\*" at a snobbish bank manager counts as Wildean wit. They even manage to wreck the film's surefire nostalgic crowd-pleaser – "We're the Sweeney, and you're nicked" – by interjecting a superfluous "shithead" mid-sentence, rendering it crass rather than crisp. The plotting is equally maladroit, its tip-offs and set-ups forming a succession of predictable pegs from which to hang shouty confrontations and action sequences.

Honesty compels me to admit that the action sections are the film's high point and its guilty

pleasure, all punchy, quick-cut and visceral, with nosebleed-decibel grime accompanying thudding blows. Love is good at conveying the reckless adrenaline of a blurry car chase through country lanes or a crunchy fistfight in which office panels buckle under headbutts. The *pièce de résistance* is a well-honed gun battle across Trafalgar Square after a bank robbery, which owes a debt to Michael Mann's *Heat* heist but does it with style. The final car chase, crashing endlessly around a caravan park, can't match it as an energetic visual assault, but the set pieces are all unsettlingly exhilarating. Like the rest of Love's flashy and reactionary oeuvre, *The Sweeney* emerges as an unreflective celebration of thuggery – only this time on the other side of the law. Its swaggering tagline – "Act like a criminal to catch a criminal" – tells you absolutely everything you need to know. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Christopher Simon  
Felix Vossen  
Allan Niblo  
James Richardson  
Rupert Preston

#### Written by

Nick Love  
John Hodge

#### Cinematographer

Simon Dennis

#### Editor

James Herbert

#### Production Designer

Morgan Kennedy  
Original Music by

Lorne Balfe

#### Sound Recordist

Simon Willis

#### Costume Designer

Andrew Cox

©Exponential (Sweeney) Limited Production Companies Vertigo Films presents a Vertigo Films/Embargo Films production

In association with  
Exponential Media  
**Executive Producers**  
Nigel Williams  
Ray Winstone  
Michael Wiggs  
Andrew Macdonald  
Allon Reich  
Paul Steadman  
Al Munteanu

#### Cast

**Ray Winstone**  
Jack Regan  
**Ben Drew**  
George Carter  
**Hayley Atwell**  
Nancy Lewis  
**Steven Mackintosh**  
Ivan Lewis  
**Paul Anderson**  
Francis Allen  
**Alan Ford**  
Harry  
**Damian Lewis**  
Frank Haskins  
**Caroline Chikezie**  
Kara Clarke

**Allen Leech**  
Simon Ellis  
**Ronnie Fox**  
Johnny Wextrup  
**Michael Wildman**  
Evelyn Simmonds  
**Steven Waddington**  
Nathan Miller

#### In Colour

**Distributor**  
E1 Films  
**10,114 ft +8 frames**

**London, present day. The Flying Squad (known as the Sweeney) foil a bullion robbery at a warehouse. DI Jack Regan is sleeping with Nancy, a colleague married to internal-affairs officer Ivan Lewis. The latter clashes with Regan over his methods. Regan and his partner George Carter arrest known villain Francis Allen for a jewellery-shop robbery in which a woman was killed, but release him when his alibi proves he was abroad. The Squad give chase to a gang of armed robbers raiding a private bank off Trafalgar Square. When Regan and Nancy corner them, she is taken hostage and executed with a bullet to the head. The squad are suspended. Regan is arrested by Lewis after intimidating a witness. In prison on remand, he is attacked by fellow prisoners. Carter tracks down a wounded robber from the bank job using Regan's snitch, and realises that the jewellery heist was a ruse. Regan is released. Carter and Regan discover that Allen masterminded the bank robbery and intends to escape on his yacht. Taking off with Carter to capture Allen and Makin, the Serbian sidekick who killed Nancy, Regan is shot in the leg during a car chase and gun battle. After a high-speed chase around a caravan park, Carter is cornered by Makin at gunpoint. Regan, though wounded, shoots Makin. Regan and Carter arrest Allen.**

been so fortune-favoured. In another of *To Rome with Love*'s vignettes, Jesse Eisenberg plays a young American architecture student, Jack, who is torn between his live-in girlfriend Sally (Greta Gerwig) and her flighty, flirty actress friend Monica (Ellen Page). The irresistible-but-dangerously-mercurial woman is a familiar figure from the Allen filmography – from Charlotte Rampling in *Stardust Memories* to the other women in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) and *Match Point* (2005) to Alison Pill's Zelda Fitzgerald in the awful and awfully successful *Midnight in Paris* (2011).

Eisenberg is advised in his romantic predicament by John (Alec Baldwin), a successful architect who, it is to be inferred, had much the same experience in his youth and who, after a chance encounter with the lad, begins to accompany and observe Jack as the seemingly invisible voice of his conscience, whispering sagacious put-downs on the "self-obsessed pseudo-intellectual" Monica to his young counterpart – though, to borrow from *The Magnificent Ambersons*, "Forty can't tell twenty."

Finally and most disposably, Alessandro Tiberi and Alessandra Mastronardi appear as a provincial Italian couple, Antonio and Milly, freshly arrived to start a new life in Rome. Accidentally parted from each other, they embark on separate romantic interludes, he with prostitute Anna (Penélope Cruz), she passed between an Italian actor, Luca Salta (Antonio Albanese), and a stick-up man (Riccardo Scamarcio). It's an infidelity-as-agent-of-romantic-rejuvenation skit that borrows freely from 1964's *Kiss Me, Stupid* while remaining entirely devoid of the energy of Billy Wilder's mid-century masterpiece, a film as attuned to the mass culture of the moment as Allen is immured from it.

If nothing else, Allen's expatriate pictures might be counted on for attractive actors and glossy city views, but *To Rome with Love* is a resolutely unseductive piece of work. There is no clue as to why it was thought advisable to dress both Gerwig and Page in billowing and



**Roamin' holiday: Judy Davis, Woody Allen**

unflattering outfits, which successfully dampen any sexual frissons that might flare up. (One almost wishes that Allen had indulged his *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* side and done something with the Amanda Knox headlines.) Shot by veteran DP Darius Khondji, *To Rome with Love* is similarly dressed down – as Allen began to do with *Midnight in Paris*, the film was colour-timed with a digital intermediary, though a change in technology can hardly explain how the city boy who enchanted Venice in *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) and Manhattan in, yes, *Manhattan* (1979), can have been so insensate to Trastevere and the views from the Janiculum Hill. (At one point sightseeing Jack and Monica are dwarfed by some ultramodern arena architecture, recalling the sanatorium scene at the Palace of the Congresses in Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, but I don't think this citation can have been intentional.)

There is a particular quality to the laughter that one hears in the theatre during these late Woody Allen movies, which seems a beat too slow and a little too faint to be wholehearted or really spontaneous. Even that polite and appreciative sound has dwindled with this distinctly dwindling work, which contains approximately one memorable exchange: "With age comes wisdom," Jack says. "With age comes exhaustion," corrects John. ☀

## Total Recall

USA 2012

Director: Len Wiseman

Certificate 12A 118m 6s

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The tiresome failure of this 80s-style blockbuster reboot can be disassembled in a number of ways, and only the most obvious is to wonder at its utter lack of self-knowledge or sardonic humour, kitschy elements that distinguished Paul Verhoeven's 1990 original in its day and now. A cackling behemoth of bad taste and a subversive anti-slickster at his peak, always ambiguously straddling the line between earnest Hollywood 'thrills' and a demonic distaste for same, Verhoeven was the oddest maker of blockbusters in the Spielberg era (when, with *Starship Troopers*, he vaulted over into whole-hog satire, his Hollywood fortunes began to dim), and we have not found the like of him since, however sorely his sabre-toothed irreverence is needed. That the new film reveals about as much witty humanity as an automated assembly line packing and shipping hubcaps is not a surprise, but so dogged a mixture of self-seriousness and mechanical vacuity ends up depressing nevertheless.

Still, director Len Wiseman's movie epitomises 2012 blockbusterdom in the way it's assembled and visually conceived, and that is the real problem. *Total Recall* doesn't tell a story (not, certainly, Philip K. Dick's original tale) so much as sketch in bits of plot information in between hyper-edited/over-digitised chases, gunfights and fistfights, which comprise at least 70 per cent of the running time and absolutely none of which matters in the least. (Harry Gregson-Williams's pointlessly non-stop disco-beat score just emphasises the vacuum.) This is the state of the art of the action film – soon, the 'idea' of a film will be communicated in a sentence of introductory narration, and the rest will be merely frantic CGI noise. Watching Wiseman's film in the dispirited funk it musters in any attentive viewer, you might be at a loss as to why it's such a dismal experience – until you realise that everything it thinks it's doing right is exactly what's wrong with contemporary Hollywood movies. Its minute-to-minute insistence on 'action' is what makes it stupid.

Which is a shame, coming as it does from the Dick library, where ideas, not running and punching, are the prime currency. Wiseman and his team of hi-tech stooges don't just fail by doing their jobs so brainlessly well; the cliché-packed movie also lazily rips off entire images and scenes from *Blade Runner* (even a morose doodle on a piano), only inciting in us the desire to leave this irritation behind and go and see that movie again, while it also revisits a few set pieces from Verhoeven's film (the triangulated you're-not-actually-here scene) only to suffocate them with editing jitters and artificially raised stakes. The carbonic odour of Christopher Nolan-style overscripting is in the air – motivational factoids about robot kill codes and hologram keys are mentioned, usually in a hurried blurt, and then ten minutes of fighting and dashing follow. Rinse, repeat.

You'd think an uber-digi remake of *Total Recall*, one without Arnold, would at least be preferable to the childlessness of, say, any recent film entailing the exploits of giant alien robots or superheroes, but such a choice can't help but muster the suspicion that we're

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Letty Aronson  
Stephen Tenenbaum  
Giampaolo Letta

#### Written by

Woody Allen

#### Director of Photography

Darius Khondji

#### Editor

Alisa Lepselter

#### Production Designer

Anne Seibel

#### Sound

TBC

#### Costume Design

Sonia Grande

#### Production Companies

Sony Pictures Classics presents  
a Medusa Film &  
Gravier production  
A Perdido production

#### Cast

Woody Allen

Jerry

Alec Baldwin

John

Roberto Benigni

Leopoldo

Penélope Cruz

Anna

Judy Davis

Phyllis

Jesse Eisenberg

Jack

Greta Gerwig

Sally

Ellen Page

Monica

Antonio Albanese

Luca Salta

Fabio Armiliato

Giancarlo

Alessandra

Mastronardi

Milly

Ornella Muti

Pia Fusari

Alison Pill

Hayley Alessandro Tiberi  
Antonio Riccardo Scamarcio  
hotel robber

In Colour  
[1.85:1]

Distributor  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing

10,050 ft +0 frames

**Rome, the present. A traffic policeman boasts of his knowledge of the city's stories, and a series of vignettes follows.**

American tourist Hayley has a chance encounter with Michelangelo, an Italian lawyer, which blossoms into romance. She meets his parents, and hers travel from New York to meet him. In Rome, Hayley's father Jerry, a retired record producer, becomes fixated on making Michelangelo's shower-singing father a star of the opera. Two nervous provincials, Antonio and Milly, arrive in Rome so that he can begin a new job, but they are soon part in the bustle of the city; Antonio meets high-priced call girl Anna, while Milly runs into movie star Luca Salta. John, a middle-aged architect who once studied in Rome, bumps into Jack, an ambitious young American architecture student who is following in the older man's footsteps. Jack is torn between his sensible live-in girlfriend Sally and Sally's sexy best friend Monica – a temptation that John warns him against. Family man Leopoldo wakes one morning to find that he has inexplicably become front-page news, and is pursued by paparazzi. The film concludes with a nighttime gathering on the Piazza del Popolo.

## Tower Block

United Kingdom 2011  
Directors: Ronnie Thompson, James Nunn  
Certificate 15 90m 21s



**Forgetaway: Colin Farrell**

not really talking about movies any more, just videogames you don't play, or some new sort of all-binary visual spectacle made entirely by machines, for machines. One could be forgiven for not only mixing up twin Botoxy beauty queens Jessica Biel and Kate Beckinsale (the good one ties her hair back; the evil one doesn't and wears evil mascara), but for thinking that they're actually avatar projections of the same program, sufficiently differentiated as far as a supercomputer goes but not quite enough for human eyes. Whatever it is, it's not entertainment. ☺

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Neal H. Moritz  
Toby Jaffe  
**Screenplay**  
Kurt Wimmer  
Mark Bomback  
**Screen Story**  
Ronald Shusett  
Dan O'Bannon  
Jon Povill  
Inspired by the short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* by Philip K. Dick  
**Director of Photography**  
Paul Cameron  
**Editor**  
Christian Wagner  
**Production Designer**  
Patrick Tatopoulos  
**Music**  
Harry Gregson-Williams  
**Production Mixer**

Glen Gauthier  
**Costume Designer**

Sanja Milkovic Hays  
**Visual Effects**

Double Negative  
Prime Focus

MPC  
The Senate VFX

LipSync Post  
Baseblack

BUF

©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

**Production Companies**

Columbia Pictures presents an Original Film production

A film by Len Wiseman

**Executive Producers**

Ric Kidney

Len Wiseman

**Production Mixer**

### Cast

**Colin Farrell**

Douglas Quaid

**Kate Beckinsale**

Lori Quaid

**Jessica Biel**

Melina

**Bryan Cranston**

Coahagen

**John Cho**

McClane

**Bill Nighy**

Matthias

**Will Yun Lee**

Marek

**Dolby Digital/**

**Datasat Digital**

**Sound/SDDS**

**In Colour**

[2.35:1]

**Distributor**

Sony Pictures

Releasing

10,629 ft +0 frames

**Post-apocalyptic Earth, the future. Factory worker**  
Douglas Quaid commutes from the Colony (Australia) to the United Federation of Britain via an inner-Earth shuttle, and decides after a few drinks to visit Rekall, a company that implants artificial memories, and buy a virtual 'vacation' – but just as he's plugged in, police charge in and begin shooting. Quaid kills them all with fighting skills he didn't know he had, and goes on the run. His wife Lori – really a UFB agent – tries to kill him. He is rescued by Melina, a member of the Colony's underground rebellion force, to which Quaid had previously belonged. He learns that he is a brainwashed double agent with a new implanted identity, though he also suspects that the whole ordeal is actually the virtual vacation and therefore isn't real. Eventually Quaid and Melina sabotage the UFB's plan to invade the Colony and decimate its inhabitants.

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

With a siege scenario dating back a full century to *Houndsditch Murderers* (1911) by way of *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Rio Bravo* (1959) and *And Then There Were None* (1945), it's safe to say that originality wasn't the primary aim of the makers of *Tower Block*. Neither is plausibility, since it requires hefty disbelief-suspension to accept a situation whereby the occupants of just the top floor of an otherwise abandoned tower block lose all contact (wired and wireless) with the outside world prior to an unseen sniper picking them off one by one, covering and/or booby-trapping all available exits. Despite a few token nods towards social comment (the film raises issues of child neglect, alcohol-fuelled loneliness, videogame addiction, profit-driven redevelopment of rundown housing estates and the fear-fuelled *omertà* that the police all too frequently encounter in such places when investigating serious crime), the characters exist mainly as sniper fodder, with most of them given only the most cursory distinguishing traits.

Nitpicks aside, though, *Tower Block* is an agreeably taut thrill-ride. The out-of-the-blue death of the sniper's first victim is as shocking to the viewer as it is to his companion, and first-time directors James Nunn and Ronnie Thompson milk the situation's inherent suspense for all it's worth. The bulk of the film takes place in the top-floor corridor, quickly established as the building's primary safe haven, where the unarmed survivors make use of whatever limited props they have to hand to try to outsmart a well-equipped assailant who seems hell-bent on playing teenage gamer Daniel's beloved *Battlefield 3* for real.

Although lacking the dialogue zingers that accompanied the situationally similar *Attack the Block* (2011), *Severance* screenwriter James Moran extracts a fair bit of agreeably dark humour. Jack O'Connell's Kurtis, top dog in the corridor's lowlife pecking order, and Ralph Brown's middle-aged, no-nonsense Neville get most of the best lines, their need to band together for survival never quite suppressing their longstanding mutual loathing. Still, Neville has a point when he asks what Kurtis has actually done to earn his £20-a-week 'protection money' when the Serenity House residents so clearly aren't being protected. Later, when Kurtis blithely owns up to one of his many crimes, he sarcastically invites Neville to "call the pigs" at the one time in his life when he'd welcome their arrival.

Sheridan Smith's Becky is the role that would have gone to Jamie Lee Curtis 35 years ago. The voice of sanity and the audience surrogate, she's determined not to go down without a fight, not least to assuage a guilty conscience dating from the opening scenes. The polar opposite of the stereotypical blonde bimbo, she devises most of the practical ideas, which assorted men volunteer to carry out not because she's a weak and defenceless woman but because they know they'd be lost without her. This focus on her character has the unfortunate side-effect of making the revelation of the sniper's identity wholly unsurprising, though most alert viewers will have worked it out long before. ☺



**Towering infernal: Smith, O'Connell**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Suki Dulai

Ronnie Thompson

James Harris

Mark Lane

**Written by**

James Moran

**Director of Photography**

Ben Moulden

**Editor**

Kate Coggins

**Production Designer**

Kaja Soderlund

**Original Music**

Owen Morris

**Sound Recordist**

Ashok Kumar-Kumar

**Costume Designer**

Matt Price

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**Production Companies**

Surya Productions

in association with

#### Kane Robinson

Mark

**Nabil Elouahabi**

Gary

**Harry McEntire**

Daniel

**Montserrat Lombard**

Jenny

**Ralph Laurila**

Jimmy

**Cast**  
Sheridan Smith  
Becky

Ralph Brown

Neville

Russell Tovey

Paul

Jill Baker

Violet

Julie Graham

Carol

Chris Fulford

Kevin

Jack O'Connell

Kurtis

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

8,131 ft +8 frames

**Serenity House, a tower block in London, the present. When Jimmy is killed in the top-floor corridor, the residents (including eyewitness Becky) are too scared to help investigating officers Devlin and Ormond. Three months later, all but the top floor has been evacuated pending redevelopment. Becky's one-night stand Ryan and several neighbours are shot dead by a sniper. The survivors gather in the corridor: Becky, Jeff, Jenny, middle-aged couple Neville and Violet, Carol and teenage son Daniel, lonely alcoholic Paul and smalltime gangsters Kurtis, Gary and Mark. Jeff opens the lift door and is killed by a booby trap. Becky, Kurtis and Paul descend the shaft but find the building's rear exit blocked. Jenny interprets pasted-up symbols as a collective death sentence for their earlier silence, and sacrifices herself. Gary and Mark confess to Jimmy's murder, and Kurtis forces them into the sniper's sights. Convinced that justice has now been done, Carol uses the main stairwell unharmed, followed by Daniel, but they are both killed leaving the building. Violet falls victim to another booby trap. Paul tries to abseil down the building's rear with a fire hose, but falls to his death. To attract attention, Kurtis sets fire to his flat. Property developers Kevin and Eddie arrive and are shot dead. The sniper enters Serenity House. Becky gives him the slip and finds a nail-gun in Kevin's truck. She incapacitates the sniper, exposing him as Devlin. He breaks free but is killed in the ensuing struggle. Becky, Kurtis and Neville emerge into the sunlight.**

## Twenty8k

United Kingdom 2012  
Directors: David Kew, Neil Thompson  
Certificate: not submitted 102m

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

According to co-director/producer Neil Thompson, *Twenty8k* was originally conceived in the mid-1990s as a docudrama in the vein of Errol Morris's 1988 US documentary *The Thin Blue Line*: a dissection of a crime and subsequent miscarriage of justice told from an array of jostling viewpoints. Although any non-fiction elements have long since departed, writers Paul Abbott and Jimmy Dowdall have retained the fundamentals, crafting a lurid ensemble whodunnit set in a gang-blighted East London on the eve of the Olympics. (The eponymous Twenty8k gang is based on a real group who bragged in court to being twice as feared as the Triad group 14k.) No livid missive from the streets (like Ben Drew's recent *Ill Manors*), it's a slick, pacy, commercially-minded conspiracy thriller, as befits a film developed by Abbott's company AbbottVision (based on US television's team-writing model).

The fictional Southwood Park estate is the backdrop for the film's pivotal murder, a nightclub shooting which results in the arrest of teenager Vipon (newcomer Sebastian Nanena). His elder sister Deeva, a Paris-based fashion exec who determines to clear her brother's name by any means necessary, is played by Parminder Nagra, also returning to her roots after working overseas (most notably a lengthy stint in *ER*). Those in her orbit include suspiciously saintly youth worker and former flame Clint (Jonas Armstrong); preening small-time dealer Ricky (Gregg Chillin), who withholds a key piece of video evidence for personal gain; gang boss Tony (Michael Socha); and the victim's girlfriend Sally (Kaya Scodelario), who moonlights as a high-end callgirl. Investigating the crime is Stephen Dillane's satanically corrupt DCI Stone, who not only carries on a sordid affair with Tony's brothel-madam mother (Kierston Wareing) but also supplies prostitutes to venal local-government figures in exchange for the



Mug shot: Michael Socha, Parminder Nagra

aggressive pre-Games clean-up of Southwood.

Abbott came fairly late to the project, but his customary skill at juggling numerous characters and strands is again in evidence. With its tortuous twists and turns, and ultimately far-reaching conspiracy, *Twenty8k* resembles a youth-oriented, brashly topical redux of his *State of Play* miniseries. It's riven with a similarly delirious cynicism – directed at the police, the media, politicians, even the Olympics. Here though, the overstuffed plot is too convoluted for comfort. If Deeva's contrived amateur sleuthing proves hard to swallow, more problematic still is the reliance on wild coincidence and credibility-straining character U-turns. As well as some uncharacteristically clunky dialogue, there's just too much going on for the gang itself to really feel like a distinct presence. For all that, the film moves along at a breathless clip and is ambitious in a kind of wide-eyed, catch-all way. You're left, though, with the sense that what might have been an expansive TV series has been overly compressed and too neatly tied up. S

## Untouchable

France 2011  
Directors: Eric Toledano, Olivier Nakache

### Reviewed by Tom Dawson

An enormous hit at the French box office last year, Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakache's culture-clash buddy movie – about the unlikely friendship between a disabled millionaire and his young carer – shamefully traffics in racist stereotypes. The wealthy white master Philippe adores classical music, visits the opera, quotes Guillaume Apollinaire and lives in a beautifully furnished Left Bank mansion. Not only is he paralysed from the neck down because of a paragliding accident, he is also widowed, and in his own words his "real handicap is living without love". Meanwhile his black servant Driss is hot-tempered, impulsive and consistently flirtatious in the company of women, and just loves dancing to Kool & the Gang and Earth, Wind & Fire. (Obviously the white supporting characters are hopeless on the dance floor, presumably because they lack natural rhythm.)

Given that *Untouchable* was executive produced by the Weinstein brothers, who have already purchased the rights for the US remake, it's perhaps unsurprising that the two protagonists learn important things from one another. Via marijuana, a customised wheelchair and being driven around by Driss at top speed in a sports car, the emotionally closed Philippe learns to open up to his loneliness; Driss knuckles down to work, gets to use his newfound knowledge of Salvador Dalí to secure a driving job, and curbs his violent impulses, while never losing his fun-loving personality. He even delivers a 'tough love' pep talk to Philippe's wayward adopted teenage daughter Elisa, who occasionally materialises in the story. Of course the impoverished banlieue where Driss comes from is shot in cold, desaturated tones, which are contrasted with the gleaming, golden interiors of Philippe's residence.

That the film struck such a chord in France and in overseas territories can perhaps be ascribed to the performances of François Cluzet and Omar Sy, who bring humanity to their clichéd characterisations, and also to a collective yearning for an uplifting fable that can gloss over

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Martin Carr  
Neil Thompson  
**Screenplay by**  
Jimmy Dowdall  
Paul Abbott  
Story by Neil Thompson, David Kew, Ian Thompson  
**Director of Photography**  
Mike Beresford-Jones  
**Editor**  
David Kew  
**Production Designer**  
Chris Richmond  
**Composers**  
Ruth Barrett  
Jake Gosling  
**Production Sound**  
Nigel Albermanne  
**Costume Designer**  
Lisa Mitton  
  
©Twenty8k Limited  
**Production Companies**  
A Formosa Films production in association with AbbottVision and Ultimate Media Fund

**Executive Producers**  
John Harrison  
Jonathan Willis  
Mike Harrison  
Alex Kakkas  
Michael C Wright  
Sonita Gale  
  
**Cast**  
**Parminder Nagra**  
Deeva  
**Jonas Armstrong**  
Clint O'Connor  
**Nichola Burley**  
Andrea  
**Kaya Scodelario**  
Sally Weaver  
**Michael Socha**  
Tony Marchetto  
**Kierston Wareing**  
Francesca  
**Stephen Dillane**  
DCI Edward Stone  
**Sebastian Nanena**  
Vipon Jani  
**Gregg Chillin**  
Ricky Shah  
**Bhaskar Patel**  
Satish  
**Rani Moorthy**  
Sita

**Jack Bence**  
Pete Fitch  
  
**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
  
**Distributor**  
Showbox Media Group Ltd.  
  
not submitted for theatrical classification  
Video certificate: 15  
Running time: 101m 40s

**East London, 2012. DCI Edward Stone arrests teenager Vipon Jani after the fatal shooting of gang member Pete Fitch. Vipon's estranged sister Deeva returns home hoping to clear his name, and reconnects with old flame Clint O'Connor. A video shot by dealer Ricky Shah shows gang boss Tony Marchetto making Vipon dispose of the gun. Ricky withholds the video as potential leverage against Tony, who is stalling on drug payments. Deeva lifts a CCTV disc that shows a masked figure fleeing the crime scene, but Stone dismisses the footage.**

**Stone bribes councillor Bill Lyons into axing youth centres frequented by the gang by offering him a night with Pete's girlfriend Sally Weaver, who moonlights at a brothel run by Tony's mother (also Stone's lover). Sally is killed in an apparent hit-and-run. Deeva obtains Sally's video camera; it shows her rape by Councillor Lyons and an earlier assignation with Home Secretary Patrick Channing. Vipon survives a stabbing while on remand. Deeva deduces that Clint is the masked figure in the CCTV video. Vipon tells Deeva that he, Sally and Pete planned to blackmail Stone, Lyons and Channing with Sally's videos, but Stone had Clint kill Pete. Ricky sends his video to Deeva, who takes it to the media. Tony takes Deeva hostage, but is killed by police snipers. Stone kills Clint. Stone and Lyons are arrested, and Vipon is freed.**



Wheels of fortune: Omar Sy, François Cluzet

## The Watch

USA 2012

Director: Akiva Schaffer  
Certificate 15 101m 50s

glaring socioeconomic inequalities in favour of individual redemption. The closing credits show real-life quadriplegic Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and his carer Abdel Sellou, whose story in the form of the documentary *A la vie, à la mort* inspired Toledano and Nakache. The interesting question is exactly why the filmmakers chose Sy, a comic actor whose parents come from Senegal and Mauritania, to play a character of North African Arab extraction. Only a cynic would suggest that this had anything to do with commercial considerations. ☀

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Nicolas Duval  
Adassovsky  
Yann Zenou  
Laurent Zeitoun  
**Written by**  
Eric Toledano  
Olivier Nakache  
**Director of Photography**  
Mathieu Vadepied  
**Editor**  
Dorian Rigal-Ansous  
**Production Designer**  
François Emmanuelli  
**Original Music**  
Ludovico Einaudi  
**Supervising Sound Recordist**  
Pascal Armant  
**Costume Designer**  
Isabelle Pannetier

©Splendido  
Quad Cinema,  
Gaumont, TF1 Films  
Production, Ten  
Films, Chaocorp  
**Production Companies**  
Quad, Gaumont, TF1  
Films Production,  
Ten Films, Chaocorp  
With the  
participation

#### of Canal Plus, CinéCinéma and TF1

With the support  
of Apidév 2 and  
Cinéma 4  
Développement  
**Executive Producers**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein

#### Cast

François Cluzet  
Philippe  
Omar Sy  
Driss  
Anne Le Ny  
Yvonne  
Audrey Fleurot  
Magalie  
Clothilde Mollet  
Marcelle  
Alba Gaia Bellugi  
Elisa  
Cyril Mandy  
Adama  
Christian Ameri  
Albert  
Marie-Laure  
Descoureaux  
Chantal  
Grégoire  
Oestermann  
Antoine  
Salimaka Kamate

#### Aunt Fatou Dorothée B Meritte Eléonore

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

**French theatrical title**  
Intouchables

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The history of the American special-effects comedy begins somewhere around 1984's *Ghostbusters*, but its premier practitioner today is Ben Stiller, by virtue of splashy spectacle-comedies such as the *Night at the Museum* films (2006, 2009) and *Zoolander* (2001).

His latest effort in this line begins with a gesture towards social satire, as neighbourhood-watch man Evan (Stiller) worries "I don't have any black friends yet but I am in the market", but unfortunately this is not developed beyond the cheap irony of the true identity of his eventual black friend.

Neighbourhood vigilantes lost much of their comic potential in February this year with the shooting in Florida of black teenager Trayvon Martin by a self-appointed patroller. And angry loner Franklin (Jonah Hill) with his bedroom arsenal is perhaps more difficult to enjoy after James Eagan Holmes's mass shooting at a Colorado movie-theatre in July.

Though director Akiva Schaffer sews some pockets of good ensemble work into an otherwise formulaic story, *The Watch* is rather less of a romp than was intended. While it barely acknowledges social reality, social reality has not been so kind to it in return. ☀

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Shawn Levy  
**Written by**  
Jared Stern  
Seth Rogen  
Evan Goldberg  
**Director of Photography**  
Barry Peterson  
**Film Editor**  
Dean Zimmerman  
**Production Designer**  
Doug Meerdink  
**Music**  
Christophe Beck  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Whit Norris  
**Costume Designer**  
Wendy Chuck

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Dune Entertainment  
III LLC (in all  
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Korea and Spain)  
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Company, Twentyfirst  
Century Fox Film  
Corporation and  
Dune Entertainment  
III LLC (Brazil,  
Italy, Japan, Korea  
and Spain)

**Production Companies**  
Twentyfirst Century  
Fox presents in  
association with  
Dune Entertainment  
a 21 Laps production  
in association with  
Ingenious Media  
**Executive Producers**  
Dan Levine  
Monica Levinson

**Cast**  
Ben Stiller  
Evan  
Vince Vaughn  
Bob  
Jonah Hill  
Franklin  
Richard Ayoade  
Jamarcus

Rosemarie Dewitt  
Abby  
**Will Forte**  
Sergeant Bressman  
**Doug Jones**  
hero alien  
**R. Lee Ermey**  
Manfred  
**Nicholas Braun**  
Jason  
**Joseph A. Núñez**  
Antonio Guzman  
**Mel Rodriguez**  
Chucho  
**Erin Moriarty**  
Chelsea  
Liz Cackowski  
Carla

**Dolby Digital/**  
Datasat Digital  
Sound  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)  
9,165 ft 0 frames

**Glenview, Ohio, the present.** Costco manager Evan Trautwig is distraught when his friend, the store's security guard, is horribly killed while on duty. Evan forms a neighbourhood watch with Bob, a nouveau-riche party guy; Franklin, a wannabe cop who failed the police entrance exam; and Jamarcus, a tweedy Englishman.

First they find a space-age orb with extraordinary powers of destruction, then they catch a reptilian extraterrestrial and knock it out with a garden gnome. Thinking they have the culprit, they celebrate in Bob's rec room. But the alien comes back to life and wreaks havoc, making off with the orb. The group breaks up.

Jamarcus reveals that he is an alien in disguise, and has been using Costco as the base for a planned mass invasion of Earth. The group raids Franklin's bedroom arsenal of weapons and uses them to mow down the aliens and safeguard suburbia.

## When the Lights Went Out

United Kingdom 2010

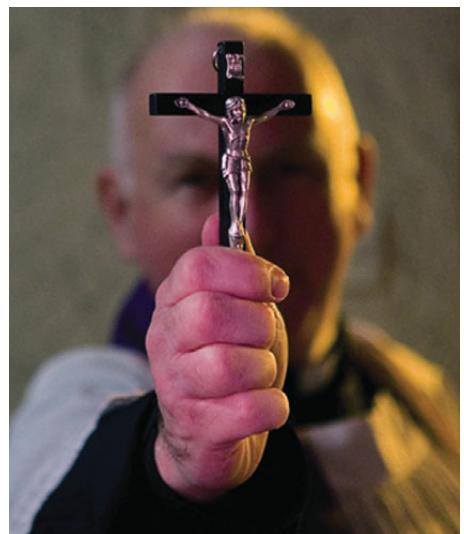
Director: Pat Holden

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

*When the Lights Went Out* is supposedly based on what an end-title card calls the UK's "most violent" real-life haunting. Pat Holden's third feature (set, like his 2009 film *Awaydays*, in 1970s Britain) is a modestly effective chiller, significantly aided by an excellent performance from Tasha Connor as Sally, a beleaguered young teenager who becomes a target for restless spirits. The title refers to Britain's 1974 power blackouts: just what one doesn't need when up against nerve-shredding poltergeist activity.

An overly portentous preamble, from the point of view of a spectre who clanks and grunts around a drab two-up two-down like a hungover Jacob Marley, doesn't promise much. But the film settles down into a credible portrait of a young working-class Yorkshire family whose new council house is host to some unwanted residents. When they start to hear inexplicable noises and see household objects fly around, dad Len (Steven Waddington) and mum Jenny (Kate Ashfield) are quick to point the finger at their surly, withdrawn daughter Sally. But then Len is shaken by an encounter with a malign entity in the cellar, and Sally starts to commune with one of the spirits.

The scares are mostly rote and derivative, and often based around period paraphernalia – a Slinky toy creepily springs downstairs; a Buckaroo horse suddenly bolts into life. But extra frisson is created by the juxtaposition of everyday environments with ancient evil. Like the insipid suburbia of *Poltergeist* (1982) or the functional, purpose-built apartments of *The Ring* (1998 & 2002) and *Dark Water* (2002 & 2005), this mundane terraced house is a far cry from horror's traditional intimidating Gothic piles. The Maynards are not moneyed bohemians looking to fix up a crumbling mansion; they're a hard-up family who stay on in the house not as some implausible form of defiance, but out of practical necessity: if they move out, they'll be bottom of the council waiting list. Their need for extra cash is clear: even though Len is a nervous wreck, he courts the media and flogs guided tours of the house to the curious. And Holden manages some nifty character work with



What possessed you? Gary Lewis

 this less-than-happy family, in particular with the increasingly isolated Sally.

*When the Lights Went Out* isn't as innovative as, say, Stephen Volk's notorious BBC docu-hoax *Ghostwatch* (1992), whose 'true-life' haunted terrace panicked viewers. But it does wryly reposition horror tropes alongside a matter-of-fact banality and a touch of Northern irreverence: the family members look at each other deadpan as the kitchen rearranges itself; an uncouth priest and Len's best mate perform a shambolic exorcism; a shifty pub regular pompously reveals he is a medium.

It all collapses into hokum in the final act, overloaded with unnecessary CGI, but until then it's a well-acted, fairly diverting ghost story – 'true' or not. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Deepak Nayar  
Bil Bungay

#### Written by

Pat Holden

#### Director of Photography

Jonathan Harvey

#### Editor

Rob Hall

#### Production Designer

Jane Levick

#### Original Music Composed by

Marc Canham

#### Sound Mixer

Martin Beresford

#### Costume Designer

Sarah Blenkinsop

©See No Evil  
Distributions Ltd

#### Production Companies

Reliance Big

Pictures, Starlight

Film Partners

and Solar Film

Partners present

in association with

kinopt pictures, Bent

Nail and Bil Bungay

a film by Pat Holden

A Deepak Nayar

and Bil Bungay

#### Production

Produced by  
Starlight Film  
Partners LLP and  
Solar Film Partners

LLP on behalf  
of See No Evil  
Distributions Limited

#### Executive Producers

David Mutch

David Pugh

#### Cast

Kate Ashfield

Jenny

Steven Waddington

Len

Craig Parkinson

Brian

Andrea Lowe

Rita

Martin Compston

Mr Price

Gary Lewis

Father Clifford

Hannah Clifford

Lucy

Tasha Connor

Sally

Molly Windsor

pale girl

Tony Pitts

Hilary Barnes

Jo Hartley

#### Production

Produced by  
Starlight Film  
Partners LLP and  
Solar Film Partners

LLP on behalf  
of See No Evil  
Distributions Limited

#### Distributor

Revolver

Entertainment

#### Jeanette Ross Mullan

monk

#### Dolby Digital In Colour

#### Distributor

Revolver

Entertainment

#### Cast

Kate Ashfield

Jenny

Steven Waddington

Len

Craig Parkinson

Brian

Andrea Lowe

Rita

Martin Compston

Mr Price

Gary Lewis

Father Clifford

Hannah Clifford

Lucy

Tasha Connor

Sally

Molly Windsor

pale girl

Tony Pitts

Hilary Barnes

Jo Hartley

## Yuma

Poland 2012

Director: Piotr Mularuk

Certificate 15 112m 57s

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

When the protagonist of Jerzy Skolimowski's *Moonlighting* (1982) turned to shoplifting during his involuntary London exile, it was a matter of survival. When *Yuma*'s protagonist Zyga (Jakub Gierszal) follows suit when visiting newly reunified Germany, it's a matter of status. As he swaps his shapeless pullover, anorak and cardboard shoes (produced for corpses; they're all he can afford) for jeans, leather jacket and cowboy boots, his body language changes accordingly, and soon he's running an extensive cross-border theft-and-smuggling racket.

The title of Piotr Mularuk's feature debut is a multiple pun, incorporating references to Yuma, Arizona (twinned with Frankfurt an der Oder, the film's main German location); Delmer Daves's 1957 Western *3:10 to Yuma* (Zyga's favourite film); and the 1990s slang term 'juma', a specific type of theft perpetrated by Poles on their better-off neighbours, thus achieving more equitable wealth redistribution. Since the film implicates much of its central town's population in such activities, it is tactfully never named, and its locations were assembled from assorted Polish and Czech towns. However, *Yuma* is less reticent about the Poles in general: a rap song playing over a montage of Zyga's 'shopping trips' cheerfully itemises stereotypes about thieves, hustlers, alcoholics and even anti-Semites.

Gierszal made a considerable splash in Poland as the tormented teen at the heart of Jan Komasa's superb *The Suicide Room* (2011), and *Yuma* is likely to cement his reputation: he has a hesitantly fluid sexuality that is not just unusual but

### Jakub Gierszal

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Piotr Mularuk

Magdalena Napieracz

Pavel Berlek

#### Written by

Piotr Mularuk

Wojciech Gajewicz

#### Director of Photography

Tomasz Dobrowolski

#### Editor

Agnieszka Glinska

#### Production Designer

Barbara Komosinska

#### Music

Jan P. Muchow

#### Sound

Petr Kapeller

#### Costume Designers

Magdalena

Rutkiewicz

Emilia Skalska

#### ©Yeti Films, Evolution

Films, Las Vegas

Power Energy Drink

#### Production Companies

Las Vegas Power

Energy Drink,

Bystrouška,

Czeski fundusz

kinematografii,

PISF-PFI, Evolution

Films, Yeti Films

With the support

#### of The State Fund for the Support and Development of Czech

Cinematography

Developed with the support of the

MEDIA Programme

of the European

Community, North

by Northwest (East

of Eden 2004)

Project developed

through FSB 2003,

a training initiative of the Media

Business School

#### Helena Sujecka

Bajadera

Karolina Chapro

Majka

Kazimierz Mazur

Rysio

Wojciech Czerwinski

Nike

Aldona Struzik

Zyga's mother

#### In Colour [2.35:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Giant Film

10,165 ft +8 frames

#### Cast

Jakub Gierszal

Zyga

Katarzyna Figura

Halina

Tomasz Kot

Opat

Krzysztof

Skonieczny

Kula

Jakub Kamienski

Mlot

Kazimierz Mazur

Rysio

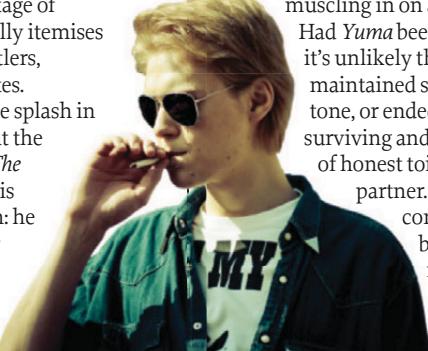
Tomasz Schuchardt

Ernest

almost unknown in Polish films, certainly in leading roles. One of his onscreen partners is his much older aunt Halinka, played by Katarzyna Figura, a former blonde bombshell who has reinvented herself in middle age as a notably fearless character actress: she's not merely unconcerned about being interrupted while on the toilet but seems to relish the attention.

Mularuk rarely quotes directly from Daves's film (though a cute touch sees Zyga boarding the train to Yuma's German twin at precisely 3:10). But twanging guitar music, a dog named after Cochise County and a running gag about a cowboy mannequin create the impression of a Western out of its time and place. Although this risks becoming hackneyed, it chimes well with a core theme about Poland's struggle for its own identity when surrounded by richer and more confident neighbours.

Although clearly no threat to anyone, the gentle former DDR immigrant Ernest becomes the focus of anti-German feeling, not least for 'stealing' Zyga's beloved Majka (a long-term crush who remains immune to Zyga's charms even when backed by conspicuous wealth). Pimp-turned-gangster Opat represents widespread fears about the Russian mafia muscling in on any lucrative business. Had *Yuma* been made 20 years earlier, it's unlikely that it could have maintained such a jauntily comedic tone, or ended with its anti-hero surviving and settling down for a life of honest toil with his second-choice partner. It's an unexpectedly conservative conclusion, but also a sign of a nation (and a national cinema) far more at ease with itself. 



**1987**, a Polish town near the DDR border. After teenagers Zyga and Rysio help East German escapee Ernest into the West German consulate, Rysio hires a prostitute. Running off without paying, Rysio is caught by Russian pimp Opat, who forces him to fellate Zyga. A few years later, Zyga is hired by his aunt Halinka to smuggle cigarettes to Frankfurt an der Oder in newly reunified Germany. There, he buys cowboy boots and shoplifts clothes to match. Impressed, his friends Bajadera, Hammer and Kula join him on the next trip: the Polish border guards are easily bribed.

In Poland, Ernest opens a bookshop with his girlfriend Majka (Zyga's long-term crush), and his presence (as a German) unnerves the others, as does Rysio's return in police uniform. When Zyga and Hammer assault Rysio, the mayor (Halinka's close friend) annuls the resulting summons. The German trips become increasingly ambitious, involving televisions and hospital equipment. Opat demands that Zyga stand aside to allow the Russians a free run. Instead, Zyga, Hammer and Kula ram-raid a jewellers, and Halinka opens a nightclub, El Dorado, with the proceeds. The German police catch and beat up Hammer and Kula, who in turn assault Ernest and Majka. Opat and his colleagues burn El Dorado down. Hammer and Kula are shot dead during another ram-raid. Zyga tries to turn himself in, but is rebuffed. He finds Rysio and Opat in the woods, surrounded by dead Russians. Despite Zyga's protests, Rysio burns Opat to death. Zyga settles down with Bajadera.



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# Up-close

## THAT DAY, ON THE BEACH



Summer in the city: 'Lonesome'

A realist, a restless romantic and an early film-effects pioneer, the Hungarian-born Paul Fejos was a silent-era director with a distinctly modern sensibility

### LONESOME

Paul Fejos; US 1928; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 69 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.19:1; Features: Fejos's 1929 silent 'The Last Performance' and reconstructed sound version of his 1929 musical 'Broadway', essay booklet

**Reviewed by Dan Callahan**

The adventurous filmmaker Paul Fejos was both a realist and a romantic, and this tension in his character resulted in his masterpiece, *Lonesome* (1928), a film made in total creative freedom at Universal Studios.

Born in Hungary in 1897, Fejos had a degree in medicine and had worked as a medical orderly during World War I. In the early 1920s, he worked in the theatre and also on eight Hungarian silent films, now lost, most of which derived from detective stories but one of which, *The Queen of Spades* (1922), was based on a Pushkin novel. He emigrated to

the United States in 1923, settling in New York, where he took on menial jobs, learned English and eventually won a position as a lab technician at the Rockefeller Institute. Restless again, in the spring of 1926 he used his entire savings of \$45 to buy an old car and drive out to Hollywood, where he hoped to find employment in the movies.

Fejos didn't find much work in Hollywood initially, and he took to stealing from orange groves just to survive. But while hitchhiking one day he met a rich New Yorker, Edward Spitz, who had a small amount of money to invest in a film. Fejos took the money (\$5,000), convinced Georgia Hale, the star of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925), to work for no salary, and put together a feature, the now lost *The Last Moment* (1928), which began with a man's suicide and then flashed back to scenes from his life. *Variety* called it "freaky" and "morbid", but Chaplin was impressed, as was Carl Laemmle Jr, the much-prized and indulged son of Universal head Carl Laemmle, who insisted that Fejos be allowed to pick a story and cast for his first film with the studio. Fejos fixed on a short synopsis about Jim and Mary, a lonely boy and a lonely girl from New York City who meet when

they go to Coney Island on their day off, and to play them he cast young comedian Glenn Tryon and beauty-contest winner Barbara Kent (who died last year at the age of 103).

*Lonesome* begins with short shots of city life: trains whooshing by, cars honking, cops blowing whistles. Fejos favours superimpositions in this movie, images within images that give us a sense of overcrowding and too much going on at once. "In the whirlpool of modern life – the most difficult thing is to live alone," reads a title. Fejos shows us very documentary-like glimpses of Mary and Jim waking up to their alarm clocks. She stretches to the sun coming in from her window and puts her long hair up with bobby pins. He halfheartedly exercises. There's a lot of realist detail: Jim's arm has fallen asleep while he's been resting and needs to be prodded back to life. Both actors seem very aware of being photographed, and it feels as if Fejos is carefully directing all their movements from behind the camera.

Next we see Jim and Mary eating their breakfast and getting lost in the subway crush, and then working at their repetitive jobs: he's a hole-puncher in a factory and she works a

switchboard. A clock is superimposed around the edges of the frame as the camera switches back and forth between her job and his (the movement between them is accomplished by a weirdly mechanistic optical effect that Fejos particularly favoured). As Mary sits at her switchboard, Fejos superimposes all kinds of talking heads in unexpected places in the frame, with chatter on the soundtrack to go along with the recorded musical score.

It's Saturday, so Jim and Mary finish work at one o'clock and have the rest of the day off. Boys and girls pair up outside, but Jim and Mary go home alone. Fejos looks at them in their separate rooms as they pace around and physically express their restlessness, a condition this director knew well. Neither of them is very bright, and they're steeped in the popular culture of their time – magazine stories about working girls marrying into money or working boys becoming millionaires. They both decide to go to Coney Island, and Jim first notices Mary on top of a double-decker bus, dealing sharply with a masher who's pressing his knee against hers.

On Coney Island, which is alive with constantly moving people, Jim pursues Mary while she coquettishly plays hard to get and keeps on losing him. He finally plops himself down next to her on the beach and starts to talk – and at this point, alas, *Lonesome* stops being a virtuosic silent romance and briefly becomes an atrocious part-talkie. After the film was completed it was held back for several months, during which time talking pictures became increasingly popular. Fejos was called on to add three speaking passages to his film – two scenes with Jim and Mary talking sweet nothings to each other and one in which Jim is taken to a police station and talks his way out. These three scenes add nothing to the film, and they really do break its spell.

"A tender love story in its silent passages, *Lonesome* becomes crude, clumsy and tediously tongue-tied in its 'talkie' passages," wrote Andrew Sarris in *The American Cinema*. Seeing the desecration that occurs when this movie tries to speak, it's easy to see why film critics for a long time thought that talking pictures would ruin the movies; the talkie interruptions in *Lonesome* are like Lillian Gish's worst nightmare of idle chatter destroying the

## *Criterion's set should lift Fejos higher up the auteur firmament, as an innovator with a swooningly romantic sensibility*

international art and language of the silent film. If you're seeing *Lonesome* for the first time with this Criterion release, I'd advise you to fastforward through the three static talking scenes, which take up around six of the film's 69 minutes, and then go back afterwards if you want to see just how destructive they are.

As Jim and Mary fall in love, Fejos adds some colour effects: red and pink balloons and red for when a rollercoaster wheel catches fire. He was a director who loved camera tricks, but he also made sure to hold his viewers' attention with the human story. He said in a later interview: "I wanted to put in a picture New York with its terrible pulse beat... everybody rushes, even when you have time, you run down to the subway... this terrific pressure which is on people, the multitude in which you are always moving but in which you are still alone."

Jim and Mary dance to the Irving Berlin tune 'Always', which plays on the soundtrack and also has a visual presence as superimposed notes and lyrics on images of a band performing the song. What subsequently happens is ingenious and very movie-like, and I won't give away the rest of the plot. Fejos himself said that the O. Henry-style ending of *Lonesome* might have been corn but it was "high corn" in his opinion. Given total control, Fejos had made a major romance that was also a critique of major Hollywood romances. He was a man who knew what it was to be lonesome and hungry, and he understood the falsity of the world his two lovers lived in, yet he shared some of their dreaminess himself. This was a knockout combination, and *Lonesome* was both a critical and financial success.

Fejos continued his experimentation with exotic camera effects in the 1929 Conrad Veidt melodrama *The Last Performance*. He also directed a full talkie, *Broadway* (1929), an adaptation of a stage hit which cost a million dollars. Most of the budget went on the construction of an enormous crane built so that the overhead camera could swoop in

and out from great distances, and an equally enormous nightclub set. In the scenes set in the club, there is a vertiginous perspective and the camera moves with a kind of dizzying speed, especially in the amazing shot where we watch workers cleaning the club. But backstage we're stuck with plenty of two-shots where the actors are obviously constrained by microphone placement to stay stiffly in place as they dish out a lot of slangy gab; the contrast between these two modes can seem a bit surreal. But although the talking scenes are technically primitive, Fejos shows himself to be a director with a very modern sensibility, capable of focusing and structuring a convoluted plot; the ensemble cast includes his *Lonesome* lead Glenn Tryon, who gives a very strange, mugging performance, and the severe Evelyn Brent, who comes across in her talking passages like Barbara Stanwyck without the talent.

*Broadway* also made money but not enough to cover costs, and so the studio attempted to humble Fejos by making him work on several projects for which he was not credited, and denying him the chance to direct *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He broke his Universal contract and took on German and French versions of *The Big House* (1930) at MGM, then went back to Europe, where he directed a string of films in different countries, including a version of *Fantomas* (1932) in France and *Spring Shower* (1932) back in his native Hungary, made in worship of his lead actress Annabella, with whom he was madly in love. His friend John W. Dodds said that every time Fejos moved to another country, "it was because of an ending love affair".

From 1935 to 1941, Fejos travelled all over the world making documentaries in far-flung locales, then settled down in New York again, building himself a very distinguished career as an anthropologist. *Lonesome* was forgotten for a long time but it began to re-emerge at festivals in the 1990s, where it invariably received a rapturous reception. This Criterion package of Fejos's three Universal movies is the most unexpected and exciting DVD release of the year, one that should instantly lift Fejos to a higher place in the auteur firmament, not just as a curiosity but as an innovator of film forms and a distinctly gruff, lightly ironic yet swooningly romantic sensibility. S



Stage fright: 'The Last Performance'



Bright lights, big city: 'Broadway'

# New releases

## BYE BYE BIRDIE

George Sidney; US 1963; Twilight Time/Region A Blu-ray; 112 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: trailer, isolated audio track

## HIGH TIME

Blake Edwards; US 1960; Twilight Time/Region A Blu-ray; 103 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: trailer, isolated audio track

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Courtesy of boutique label Twilight Time, two CinemaScope exemplars of splashy mid-century Americana can again be seen in all their exuberant gaudiness.

The premise of the 1960 Broadway hit *Bye Bye Birdie* came from the worldwide mourning of teenage girls following Elvis Presley's induction into the army, though Beatlemania was fast approaching by the time George Sidney's screen version was released. The film's Presley knockoff is Conrad Birdie – played by pushing-30 Jesse Pierson wearing a gold lame Evel Knievel jumpsuit (which doesn't flatter his mid-section) and delivering off-time hip thrusts in a louche characterisation that wholly fails to capture the young King's charisma while anticipating his Las Vegas decadence.

Birdie arrives in Sweet Apple, Ohio, for a publicity stunt: before going into the forces, he will appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to bestow a symbolic last kiss on randomly selected Sweet Apple everyteen Kim McAfee (Ann-Margret, whose rising star significantly expanded the part). Kim's steady, Bobby Rydell, is peeved by this presumptuous butting-in, setting the scene for a satire on the threat posed to chaste American mating rituals by a televisual age in which mediated heartthrobs are big business.

Birdie's introductory number, which has him bump-and-grinding on Sweet Apple's Soldiers and Sailors monument, is a raver called 'Honestly Sincere'. The song represents the gulf between Birdie's hypocritical pop nostrums and the much-discussed 'real thing' – for Birdie's inconsequentiality is later everywhere evident – but its Dionysian spirit is still more stirring than moony true-love twaddle like 'One Boy'. Birdie's roadhouse number 'A Lot of Livin' to Do' has a clever, ambivalent staging, its lyrics sending up the ever-more-ever-better promises of consumer culture while Onna White's choreography pokes fun at the manner in which sacred monogamy is reinforced by the mutual fear that the other might be having a better time. The film's subversive subtext is sealed by the presence of Paul Lynde, reprising his stage role as the McAfee patriarch, a miserable, closeted psychopath clenching his pipe between donkey teeth as though to shatter it and frequently staring into the camera with stark, suicidal desperation.

Lynde's big number is, of course, 'Kids'. The optimistic answer to that song's question – 'What's the matter with kids today?' – is 'absolutely nothing' in Blake Edwards's *High Time*, which has 51-year-old chain restaurateur Harvey Howard (Bing Crosby) enrolling as an incoming freshman at an anonymous Southern university (shades of the 1986 Rodney Dangerfield film *Back to School*). As with *Birdie*,

the generation gap is at issue, but *High Time* is pro-youth in a fashion that has nothing to do with quantifiable age – Harvey's uptight kids are the only real fogeys here. There's something sweetly utopian about the way Howard, after physically proving himself in chin-ups and bonfire-building, is freely accepted by his dormmates and the student body at large (among their number that remarkable force of nature Tuesday Weld, anxiously doodling her line readings all over scenes). The humour is pretty eye-rolling but one can't but admire Edwards's quietly intricate *mise en scène* in the tentative romantic scenes between Crosby and Nicole Maurey's French teacher, or take pleasure in the festive interstitial transitions, based on changes of season and academic year, which show the period's new willingness to integrate animation and design elements into live-action films (also evident in *Birdie's* knockout 'The Telephone Hour' number). It's a bit of formal radicalism in what's officially called the twilight of American normalcy.

**Discs:** The transfers far exceed any prior outing, while extras are limited to trailers and isolated soundtrack audio – a pleasure in the case of *High Time*, an early example of the symbiotic three-decade collaboration between Edwards and composer Henry Mancini.

## CLEOPATRA

Cecil B. DeMille; US 1934; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: commentary by F.X. Feeney, 'Cecil B. DeMille: Hollywood's Epic Director', 'Forbidden Film: The Production Code Era', theatrical trailer

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Pauline Kael complained that the "dialogue sounds like gossip over backyard clotheslines". Yet DeMille's lavish and lascivious movie gets its enviable liveliness not only from a cracking visual pace, but from its pared-down pithy exchanges, expressly designed to bring an epic love story to life for a mass audience. You'd swap all of Mankiewicz's sclerotic 1963 version just for Claudette Colbert's teasing seduction of Henry Wilcoxon's bluff, guarded Mark Antony, employing everything from faux-confession to hiccups. Because despite DeMille's periodic use of silent-cinema grammar (the Battle of Actium even includes footage from *The Ten Commandments*), the film's charm lies in its brazen 1930s quality, right from the gilded art-deco Egyptian settings and Travis Banton's nightclub-on-the-Nile costuming to the snap-and-crackle of wit that



Jewels of the Nile: 'Cleopatra'

makes Colbert's Cleopatra as much feisty dame as femme fatale. F.X. Feeney's commentary is nicely eloquent too on how DeMille casts his heroine as a great entertainer in his own mould, captivating her Roman prey by sheer show.

Filled with DeMille's mid-period vitality and his masterful use of movement, the film has a sly sensuality – which mocks the stiffened Production Code that it beat by a whisker – replacing the more eye-popping antics of the director's *Sign of the Cross* (1923). Leopard-women catfight under a cracking bullwhip on Cleopatra's barge, Colbert's fetishistic costumes are just this side of decency, and as she reclines with Mark Antony, a hand plucking a harp in the foreground seems to caress her barely clothed body. What keeps it from kitsch or tinselly tragedy is Colbert's effortlessly layered performance, sliding from girlish flirtation via cold calculation to a self-sacrificing hero worship. Like her character, she's a creature of infinite variety.

**Disc:** A ravishing HD transfer using the UCLA Film & TV Archive restoration, with lovely silvery tones, and a crisp soundtrack. F.X. Feeney's commentary is excellent, densely researched and entertaining, with forensic readings that give due weight to interludes such as Herod's alternately collusive and comic scenes with the lovers. But the DeMille biography featurette is too short to put the film in a proper context within his long career.

## THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Luis Buñuel; France/Italy/Spain 1972; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 102/98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: critical analysis by Peter William Evans, trailer

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

This has the reputation of being the 'easiest' of Buñuel's late films, and it was duly clasped to the collective bosoms of the very bourgeoisie whose foibles and crimes it so gleefully laid bare. Like the Vicomte de Noailles, Buñuel's backer of 40 years before, who described the film as "exquisite and delicious", they ignored its many well-aimed barbs, awarded it an Oscar (to Buñuel's horror) and turned it into a solid commercial hit at the time and a much revived classic thereafter. Which is why, even after multiple viewings, its savage acuity and unflinching surrealism still come as a surprise, as does its crepuscular creepiness: the soldier's flashback-dreams about encountering the living corpses of his



'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie'

# HAIL MARY

Though she is mistily remembered as an Edwardian sweetheart, Mary Pickford was in fact an assured filmmaker, a mogul masquerading as a moppet

## MARY PICKFORD: RAGS & RICHES COLLECTION

**The Poor Little Rich Girl/The Hoodlum/Sparrows**

Maurice Tourneur/Sidney A. Franklin/William Beaudine; US 1917/19/26; Milestone Films/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; 75/92/90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Ramona' (1910), commentaries, home-movie footage, outtakes, trailer, Mary Louise Miller featurette, child-friendly bonus features

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

A trailblazing star-producer who excelled at playing winsome child-women, Mary Pickford defies simple categorisation. As Milestone's new set confirms, the actress remembered mistily as an Edwardian sweetheart was really an assured filmmaker. For these productions at least, she was the big cheese on set too, whether forcing her director to shoehorn improvised mud-fights into *The Poor Little Rich Girl* or entertaining her infant *Sparrows* co-stars with visits from her husband Douglas Fairbanks's colleagues, luridly costumed from shooting *The Black Pirate* next door.

The films collected here represent a fine introduction to Hollywood's first female megastar. They also present Pickford as an actress whose roles transgress class boundaries as frequently as they smudge the borders between childhood and adolescence. *The Poor Little Rich Girl* is a heartfelt drama of child neglect, enlivened by raucous slapstick and macabre fantasy. An adaptation of a popular play, it benefits hugely from Maurice Tourneur's elegant direction and Ben Carré's elaborate design, but owes its vigour to Pickford and her best friend and screenwriter Frances Marion. The stylistic clash between the exuberance of the two women (those hard-won mud-fights) and Tourneur's desire to make a 'dignified' picture is analogous to the film's subject-matter, which champions the freedoms of childhood fun over the repressive conventions of upper-class polite society.

In her first child-impersonation role, Pickford is ten-year-old Gwendolyn, the love-starved daughter of wealthy parents who bounces off the walls of their well-appointed mansion, with only a clutch of mostly disdainful servants for company. Respite comes only from kindly working-class pals: the plumber, the organ-grinder and some rascally local kids. Gangly-legged, pouting and dwarfed by Carré's oversized sets, Pickford gives a fine physical imitation of a pre-teen: disarmingly joyful when dancing in the spray caused by a bathroom plumbing mishap, sulkily envious while watching children skate outside her window. The film's crisis comes when



No little girl lost: Mary Pickford

a over-sedated Gwen hallucinates as she hovers on the brink of death and the callous words of adults form grotesques: a two-faced woman, circling bears on Wall Street.

Pickford plays another rich kid in *The Hoodlum* (1919), a more flat-footed and class-conscious romp in which she flings herself into the role of Amy, a spoiled Fifth Avenue brat who goes slumming in an East Side tenement. Initially sniffy, Amy is soon spitting out slang, apparently in an Irish accent, and dancing on the cobbles with her fellow urchins. Her transformation is all in the name of sociology and a no doubt well-intentioned treatise that her father is writing, but for the audience it's just a lark, and a chance to demonstrate the authentic, vibrant loveliness of good old working-class types. There's a handsome man in the neighbouring slum (another toff brought low), and a tacked-on intrigue, but this confection is clearly a showcase for Pickford's virtuoso boisterousness. As such it is well placed in this set as a corrective to misapprehensions of the star as no more than wholesome girl-with-the-curls passivity.

*Sparrows* was Pickford's masterpiece: a horror-adventure-comedy for children, which may have taken cues from the dark grandeur of German expressionism but could only have been realised by Hollywood. The agonies of infant mortality are here soothed by a light-bathed vision of Christ, the iniquities of child

*Pickford's roles transgress class boundaries as frequently as they smudge the borders between childhood and adolescence*

slavery leavened by cutesy shenanigans in the potato patch. The 33-year-old Pickford plays Mama Mollie, the teenage matriarch of a group of kids trapped on a baby farm, all of whom are maltreated, overworked and rapidly losing their faith. It's a fairytale, with an ogre of a villain (Gustav von Seyffertitz, whose grim features are perfect here), a daring escape across alligator-infested waters and a happy ending – but the mood is rich and troubling. With a sickly foretaste of the Southern gothic in *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), both the peril and the freckled infants are real enough to care about. Even the resolution is a poser: is Molly, transported to Millionaires' Row and nursing a rich man's baby with a whiskey bottle, about to be adopted or seduced? The film's triumphant combination of sweetness and bite is a testament to the talents of its star – a mogul masquerading as a moppet.

Remastered for Blu-ray (in the case of the latter two titles, from 35mm prints), the films have crisp definition and deep tints, marred only by the occasional splash of damage, and are sensitively accompanied by new orchestral scores. Extras comprise articulate commentaries on *The Poor Little Rich Girl* and *Sparrows*, a histrionic Biograph short starring Pickford (*Ramona*, 1910), home-movie footage from Pickford and Fairbanks's Beverly Hills estate 'Pickfair', *Sparrows* outtakes and trailer and a featurette on Mary Louise Miller, who played the baby in *Sparrows*. For younger viewers, each feature is bookended by sketches in which a gaggle of Californian kids discover an old-fashioned film projector in the attic and listen attentively while grandpa explains the mysteries of silent cinema, from sprocket holes and the flammability of nitrate to Pickford's stardom. **S**

# New releases

parents, his father's fatal head wound still red and glistening, are as spine-joltingly uncanny as anything in *Los olvidados* (1950) or the not dissimilar *The Exterminating Angel* (1962). So too is the *Un chien Andalou*-like vision of cockroaches swarming across a piano keyboard, accompanied by the screams of yet another member of the lower orders being put in his place by a uniformed representative of bourgeois authority. Throughout, Buñuel's six characters in search of a meal (with Julien Bertheau's faithful worker-bishop tagging along like a cossack lapdog) expertly negotiate the near-invisible line between civilisation and chaos, savouring screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière's delicious *bons mots* as though they were appearing in a latterday Oscar Wilde play – which, in many ways, they are. They're so comfortable in their rigidly circumscribed world that they even dream each other's dreams, and blithely shuck off their moral principles as easily and habitually as they dress for dinner. In particular, Fernando Rey's suave ambassador clearly favours hypocritical France over potentially revolutionary Miranda (a fictional surrogate for the Latin America in which Buñuel spent much of his life and career), defiantly clinging to its culinary trappings even at the risk of sudden, violent death.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray, sourced from the restoration that recently enjoyed a theatrical revival, wasn't supplied for review, but even the DVD offers a brighter picture and more visible detail than the older Optimum release.

## DON QUIXOTE

Grigori Kozintsev; USSR 1957; Mr Bongo/Region-free DVD; Certificate PG; 102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

The first of three big-budget widescreen adaptations of literary 16-tonners made by former avant-garde experimentalist and self-styled 'Eccentric' Grigori Kozintsev in the last 14 years of his creative life, *Don Quixote* is slightly less celebrated than *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1971) and it's initially easy to see why. But while parts of it are uncharacteristically stodgy, and Kozintsev's friend and regular collaborator Dmitri Shostakovich is sorely missed, the film's original acclaim as one of the most satisfying big-screen Cervantes adaptations still holds surprisingly true 55 years on.

Casting is crucial with this material, and the double act of beanpole Nikolai Cherkasov (in the title role) and bran-tub Yuri Tolubeyev (as Sancho Panza) could hardly be bettered. In particular, the fact that Cherkasov once played Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible for Eisenstein adds heft to Quixote's delusions. There's still a hint of a genuine warrior underpinning his otherwise tatterdemalion bearing, and Cherkasov's ramrod-straight face defies us to laugh: when he converses with a caged lion, the two seem perfectly matched. Structurally, the film takes considerable liberties with the original – the windmill-tilting now occurs near the end, after the encounter with the court's sadistic inhabitants that takes up much of the middle section, with the court jester coming across as a particularly



The odd couple: 'Don Quixote'

foul surrogate for a backstabbing minor apparatchik. Typically for a Soviet literary adaptation, Kozintsev and screenwriter Yevgeni Shvarts favour a philosophical rather than postmodern approach (the unfinished *Don Quixotes* of Orson Welles and Terry Gilliam promised to go much further down the latter route) but the central scenario of a man attempting to act out his dreams in a world full of cruel and cynical realists comes across with genuine moral force, presumably even more intensified at a time when the Soviet Union was still a geopolitical reality and Stalin had only been dead four years. The Crimea makes a surprisingly convincing stand-in for 16th-century Spain: only the Russian dialogue prevents the illusion from being perfect.

**Disc:** The source print is surprisingly clean, it's framed correctly in the original Sovscope aspect ratio, and the frequent colour shifts can probably be blamed on the effects of time on the Sovcolor process. But there's no excuse for releasing a widescreen film

in a non-anamorphic transfer well into the Blu-ray era: the only saving grace is that at least the subtitles aren't cropped when the picture is zoomed to fill the screen.

## THE EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERIES – VOLUME 1

**Clue of the Twisted Candle/Marriage of Convenience/The Man Who Was Nobody/Partners in Crime/The Clue of the New Pin/The Fourth Square**

Allan Davis, Clive Donner, Montgomery Tully, Peter Duffel; UK 1960-61; Network/Region 2 DVD; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 anamorphic; Certificate PG; 441 minutes; Features: bonus films 'Urge to Kill' and 'October Moth', illustrated booklet by Kim Newman, image gallery

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

In 1959, Anglo-Amalgamated in Britain and Rialto in Germany both started updating for new film audiences the Edgar Wallace tales of secret societies, gangsters, eccentric policemen and master criminals that had enthralled millions in the interwar years. The flamboyant Rialto films created an ersatz and perverse England permanently shrouded in fog, in effect transplanting the era of Jack the Ripper to the then present day, barely pausing to change the wardrobe but adding plenty of lurid flourishes.

By comparison, the series of 40-odd films made by Anglo-Amalgamated on tight budgets at Merton Park Studios is sober, down-to-earth and, initially, more beholden to its literary sources. Designed for the lower berth of a cinema double-bill, the six hour-long thrillers in this first collection range from locked-room mysteries and murderous love triangles to international diamond smuggling and bank robbers on the lam. There are occasional cosmetic topical touches – a getaway on a Vespa scooter in *Marriage of Convenience*, for instance,



**Johnny Guitar** The strangest western ever made in Hollywood, it throbs with oestrogen and anxiety in a way that no masculine-centred film could

beatniks in *The Man Who Was Nobody* (both 1960) – but the attraction remains reassuringly old school, with villains thwarted, plucky amateurs rescued and dastardly foreigners (Albanian businessmen, French magicians, Australian truck drivers) sent packing. Along with the zippy pace and memorable 'Man of Mystery' theme tune by Michael Carr, the films boast strong casts: Harry H. Corbett as a copper with a chip on his shoulder; Hazel Court as a winsome private eye; and Bernard Lee, starring as a Scotland Yard detective in five of the films, usually paired with Stanley Morgan (who, in *Partners in Crime*, is named 'Sergeant Rutledge' – they were obviously fans of John Ford at Merton Park).

**Discs:** The sharp anamorphic transfers, with inky blacks and nary a nick in sight, are truly superb. In putting this long-desired series on DVD, Network has also included some unrelated releases that were occasionally bundled in for sales purposes. *Urge to Kill* is a dull story of a mad killer on the loose, but *October Moth* is a revelation. A brooding four-hander written and directed by John Kruse, it's worth the price of the set on its own.

## A HOLLIS FRAMPTON ODYSSEY

Hollis Frampton; US 1966-79; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 266 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: essays, audio comments by the filmmaker, 1978 interview excerpt, gallery of graphic works, recorded performance piece from 1968

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

It's almost an act of pure, sainted beneficence, Criterion's decision to archive package old-school avant-gardists' easily lost and forgotten oeuvres, beginning with the two humongous Brakhage sets and now gifting Hollis Frampton, semi-structuralist and ambitious 16mm montage-dreamer, with this four-and-a-half-hour Blu-ray and DVD aggregation of his best-known films.

Among the tribe of mid-century 'New American Cinema' experimenters, Frampton never had the fame or cult reverence garnered by, say, Brakhage, Michael Snow, Gregory Markopoulos, Ken Jacobs, Jack Smith or Andy Warhol, either before or after he died in 1984 (aged 48), but he was an integral part of the scene, and his films survive as both intellectual provocations and emotional objects long after so much of the other work produced in the 1960s-70s seems pallid and fadingly hip today.

Looking at Frampton's work now – long after the idea that avant-garde films could be inquiries into the medium's own plastic experience has more or less vanished from the discourse (a nod to the über-structuralism of Christian Marclay's *The Clock* notwithstanding) – can be both nostalgic and moving. He was always the most humane and personal of the so-called structuralists, as in his stirring 1971 masterpiece (*nostalgia*), in which a first-person Frampton narration (actually spoken by Snow) ruminates over a series of art-scene photographs he's taken over the years, as each in turn is immolated on an electric grill, to upsetting and mournful high-contrast effect. But the emotionally reserved tales Frampton tells



Time and memory: Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*)

somewhere leap ahead of the visuals, describing photographs we haven't seen yet, as the bereft images of a past moment we're looking at are slowly, graphically reduced to ashes. Maybe it's the best short film about memory ever made.

Included in the set is *Zorns Lemma* (1970), famously the first experimental feature to play at the New York Film Festival and a hypnotic abecedarian collage consisting largely of one-second shots of public text, running from A to Z over and over again, until the words are replaced one at a time by singular recurring images of work, nature and movement, and the language vanishes altogether. ('Zorn's lemma' is an obscure set-theory 'proposition' – Frampton was a bit of a maths tourist.) Frampton never tired of interrogating the often outright combat between the intents of visual communication and the act of watching, best illustrated in the tripartite *Surface Tension* (1968) and *Poetic Justice* (1972), a proto-Kiarostamiian anti-movie in which Frampton films the pages of a film treatment instead of the film itself. (Perhaps not surprisingly, it's pretty gripping.)

Rounding out the 24-film library is a sample of Hollis's 'Magellan Cycle', a massive enveloping project that involved calendrical projection ambitions and more than 800 planned films (60 or so of them made in the decade leading up to Frampton's death). It's a rueful fragment from an unfinishable work conceived, like Markopoulos's 80-hour *Eniaios*, with the faith that cinema could change – or at least redefine – the world.

**Discs:** The arsenal of contextual material (essays by scholars Ed Halter, Bruce Jenkins and others) is vital but, given the often cosmic language used to typify New American Cinema aesthetics, sometimes overcooked.

## JOHNNY GUITAR

Nicholas Ray; US 1954; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 NTSC DVD; 110 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: three-minute introduction by Martin Scorsese

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The strangest western ever made in Hollywood, a screaming opera of Freudian signs, a camp genre nova of colour-codings, an epic battle for gender supremacy played out in a dream landscape of cowboys and outlaws and sexually maddened frontier women – however you evoke Nicholas Ray's ur-metawestern and however many times you've seen it, it still stupefies and awes. Feeling at the gitgo

like windy post-apocalyptic surrealism, and thereafter pitched in the blood-boiling key of Do-Me, Ray's movie extrapolates at least eight conflicting perspectives, all fuelled by unsatisfied love-lust and all potentially homicidal: Joan Crawford's heart-hardened saloon entrepreneur, Mercedes McCambridge's tortured cattle harpy, Sterling Hayden's covert gunslinger, Scott Brady's sociopathic hood, Ward Bond's neocon land baron et cetera, everybody wanting someone they can't have or not wanting anyone to want anybody, or both. The vectors of sexual force are masked by arguments over grazing land versus railroad expansionism, but Ray and his cast fill the film with lurid Tricolor hysteria, so that what on earth Crawford will be wearing from scene to scene – in contrast to McCambridge's butch cowgirl duds and black funeral garb (with gun belt) – becomes as crucial as a tropical bird's mating plumage.

It's more than a matter of simply swapping guys for dolls; *Johnny Guitar* throbs with oestrogen and anxiety in a way no masculine-centred western could, with Crawford's defiant White Queen (oh, her huge, beleaguered eyeballs) and McCambridge's spitting Black Queen facing off in the end across the chessboard of post-war society's warring gender roles. At the same time, the scenario's bald-faced indictment of mob-think and officiated blackballing conjures McCarthyism potently, and it's no surprise to find that the screenplay was not written by the credited Philip Yordan but by HUAC blacklistee Ben Maddow.

Ray's best films are tempestuous, unstable experiences, battling against their own studio-system limitations and genre identities, and it's this fundamentally conflicted nature that the *Cahiers* crowd grasped in the 1950s and what makes his oeuvre – at least from *In a Lonely Place* (1950) to *Bigger Than Life* (1956) and beyond – sing today. And *Johnny Guitar* may be the most mercurial of them all, a volatile cocktail of social change and traditional forms caught midway through their slow-mo explosion.

**Disc:** An unremarkable vault print. The Martin Scorsese introduction was recorded in 1995.

## MAIDSTONE AND OTHER FILMS BY NORMAN MAILER

### Wild 90/Beyond the Law/Maidstone

Norman Mailer; US 1968/68/70; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 81/97/105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: essays

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

A rarely surveyed mutant child of the New Wave era, the shortlived directorial career of Norman Mailer can perhaps be best characterised as one of cinema's most spectacular acts of self-eviscerating self-indulgence. Grabbing the era's experimental zeitgeist as though wrestling a steer on a drunken bet, and co-opting the style of *cinéma vérité* by way of D.A. Pennebaker's handheld cinematography, Mailer at the height of his fame as a runaway-bull novelist, essayist, self-promoter and talk-show spectacle decided that movies, now apparently freed from the bother of craft and viewed less like



# THE FULL PICTURE

The 'Hyperkino' releases of Soviet classics are a cinephile's delight, upgrading the standard DVD extras with a wealth of onscreen text, commentary and video clips

## HYPERKINO RELEASES

*Happiness/The Heir to Genghis Khan/Childhood of Maxim Gorky*

Alexander Medvedkin/Vsevolod Pudovkin/Mark Donskoi; USSR 1934/28/38; Ruscico Hyperkino/Region-free DVD; 62/96/98 minutes; Features: Hyperkino annotated versions

### Reviewed by John Riley

For some home cinephiles, the DVD extras are almost as important as the film. But for every tight and informative commentary there's a flabby stream of consciousness that ignores important points or lingers on long after the scene it relates to has passed. And there's the problem: a scene justifying a huge amount of commentary might pass in a few seconds, while there may be little to say about other, longer ones.

One way around this would be for viewers to have a detailed study in hand and stop the film as appropriate to refer to it. In essence this is the idea behind the Hyperkino series of Soviet films. Each comes on two discs – a 'normal' one with subtitles in a range of languages, and a 'Hyperkino' disc. With the latter, a number occasionally appears in the top right of the screen; clicking on it brings up a series of pages of text (in either Russian or English), photographs and even clips from related films.

A number of the Hyperkino releases have been reviewed in these pages over the past year (Eisenstein's *The Strike* and *October*, Kuleshov's *Engineer Prite's Project* and *The Great Consoler*), while the recent release of several Boris Barnet titles (*Outskirts*, *The Girl with the Hat Box*, *By the Bluest of Seas*) was discussed by Mark Le Fanu in the August 2012 issue of *S&S*. Sitting alongside these recent releases are Alexander Medvedkin's collectivisation comedy *Happiness* (1934), Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The Heir to Genghis Khan* (aka *Storm over Asia*, 1928) and Mark Donskoi's *Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (1938).

*Happiness* has sometimes been a fugitive film, more known about than seen. I remember a rare London screening being abandoned after the fragile print broke three or four times. The surreal, sometimes even nightmarish comedy transports a selfish and increasingly disillusioned pre-Revolutionary peasant to puzzlement and eventually redemption under collectivisation. It relies heavily on folklore and the visualisation of popular sayings (we see someone literally 'giving up the ghost'), and also finds a place for some translucently robed nuns – a shockingly sexual moment in any Soviet film, let alone one of this vintage. The commentary by film historian Nikolai Izvolov (who developed the

Hyperkino format with Natascha Drubek-Meyer) is invaluable in explaining all this and teasing apart the implications of the intertitles' Russian grammar. The clips range from other films by Medvedkin to the works of Eisenstein and Parker and Alexeieff.

Like most Soviet films, *Happiness* is usually shown in something other than its original form: there were a few small snips but, having been banned in 1937, it's in very good condition. This version uses the soundtrack added by Chris Marker in the 1970s – a compilation of impressionist piano music and weird sound effects that has been subtly expanded to match the original with its slightly longer intertitles.

Set in 1920s Mongolia, *The Heir to Genghis Khan* tells of a hunter who rebels against western fur traders' underhandedness and leads a furious fightback. The last panel in Pudovkin's unofficial 'Revolutionary Trilogy' (with *Mother* and *The End of St Petersburg*), it's also the most visceral, climaxing with a symbolic storm that sometimes accelerates to single-frame editing. Its anti-imperialism meant that the foreign release (retitled *Storm over Asia*) was slashed, and the 1949 sonorised version shed a quarter of its length to come in at 96 minutes. This short version is less contemplative and misses some fascinating ethnographic material, and is also less clear in identifying the imperialist force as the British Army. (In fact, virtually every other country had more troops there than the British,

*The Hyperkino format is an ingenious way of stepping up an academic gear from an audio commentary*

who in any case arrived after the film was set.) Sadly, Hyperkino's is that short version but it is nevertheless worthwhile. Sergei Kapterev places the film in the context of Pudovkin's output and explains some of his editing theories, including his characteristic 'magnifying glass of time' whereby he loops back to repeat an event from a slightly different angle. Kapterev also discusses the complex history of the Mongolian Republic, and there are reproductions of original documents (more useful to Russophones) and clips from the 1949 sonorised version as well as Ilya Trauberg's 1936 film *Son of Mongolia*.

Mark Donskoi's Maxim Gorky trilogy was always in less danger of being eclipsed by politics, as it seems far more in step with the official line of socialist realism. *Childhood of Maxim Gorky* is the first part and covers the writer's early years, living with his sadistic, self-pitying grandfather. It's the best-looking of these three releases: a lovely copy of the 1938 original rather than the smearied and edge-clipped 1977 'restoration'. Jeremy Hicks's essayettes vary between explications of particular aspects of the film to setting it in the context of Donskoi's career and Soviet cinema, covering topics ranging from the effect of the re-recorded 1977 soundtrack to the role of clocks in the director's work. A major theme is how the source book was adapted for the screen – something that could only happen when Gorky was dead, since he'd fought against sanctification – and how Donskoi in his turn balances the demands of realism and socialist realism in this intensely corporeal film.

Hyperkino is certainly an ingenious way of stepping up an academic gear from an audio commentary, and so far the films released have proved worthy of it. ☀



Soldier's tales: Pudovkin's 'The Heir to Genghis Khan' ('Storm over Asia')

# New releases

◀ symphonic composition than late-night jazz, would be his new playpen. All told it's a sophomoric, aimless, atavistic spectacle but a knowing one – Mailer is hyper-aware of his own egomania and is clearly not searching for the 'truth' in the garbage heap, like so many filmmakers at the time, but for a kind of happenstantial grandiosity. Cassavetes looks like Walt Disney by comparison.

In fact, Mailer's films (this set doesn't include his menopausal self-adaptation from 1987, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, which would have been a fascinating addition) survive as documents of how much, exactly, the man thought he could get away with. In regards to film form, the treatment of actresses and the use of improvisation, the Warhol-influenced Mailer was interested in minimal responsibility, maximum entourage worship and a filmmaking process largely fuelled by free-flowing drink. These are the films of a brilliant, talkative, Warholian superstar who can really hold his liquor on camera, and it's difficult and discomfiting to consider them merely as movies and not as the fossil record of a monstrous brat of a public intellectual in performance mode and the Wild West cultural moment in which he thrived.

*Wild go* and *Beyond the Law* ('made' the same year, revealingly, as William Greaves's improvised but brilliantly self-interrogatory *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*) are scriptless, ultra-grainy, drunken bell-jar ordeals, the first hanging with a trio of doltish gangsters in a well-stocked warehouse loft, the second a night-long loiter in a New York police station and bar. Cluttered with famous-friend cameos (boxer José Torres, poet Michael McClure, writer/gadfly George Plimpton) and sound-recorded so poorly that all but a fraction of the on-the-spur dialogue is unintelligible, the films both feature Mailer at their centre, as the kind of savage, soiled-blue-collar bully-king he imagined he knew so well. (As Pauline Kael pointed out, as a Harvard man he had a way to stretch.)

*Maidstone* is far more ambitious – an all-colour mock doc shot in the Hamptons, it posits Mailer as a genius filmmaker (likened to Dreyer and Fellini, someone remarks, and it's impossible to tell whether that's meant as a joke or not) who is also running for president, and follows him as he casts and shoots his new film (a hardcore remake of *Belle de jour*), launches into impromptu boxing matches and stages promotional events for the press. Quasi self-satirical when it's not just being outrageous (vulnerable star-struck women are chomped and then tossed aside like half-eaten fruit), *Maidstone* thankfully has the professional energy of Rip Torn on hand, in the role of the protagonist's wild-card half-brother. Amid the messy chaos, much of which seems to have happened off-camera, the most notorious moment is Torn's – in the end, out of character, he comes at Mailer with a hammer, and the two men have a genuine brawl – but as much as the film's legend would have it a 'real' incident, it's a clearly staged gonzo scene, illustrative only of a last-ditch



Night moves: Norman Mailer in 'Beyond the Law'

boozy desire for relevance and/or legitimacy.

**Discs:** Criterion is Criterion, but the films' technical shortcomings (similar to the ones that made a naive Cassavetes reshoot almost all of *Shadows*) can be insurmountable. Michael Chaiken's essays make as considered a case for the films as one can imagine.

## MAN OF THE STORY

Adoor Gopalakrishnan; India 1996; Second Run/

Region 0 DVD; Certificate PG; 102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: interview with Adoor Gopalakrishnan, booklet

### Reviewed by Mark Cousins

In this era of films coming back to life, here's a splendid resurrection. For years I've had a bootleg DVD of the Indian film *Man of the Story*, about a rich boy being politicised. The image was so fuzzy that I couldn't see whether it was as good as Bertolucci's similarly themed *Before the Revolution* (1964) but even through the visual murk it seemed bolder than *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004).

But now Second Run has brought out this new, digitally restored version, and it's like someone has switched on the lights on the mosaics in Santa Maria in Trastevere. The *bildungsroman* story is the same, of course, but *Man of the Story* is revealed as a work of art. It covers the murder of Gandhi, the rise of the Naxalite Marxists in Kerala and years of crisis, yet it is graceful rather than angry, as if Vermeer had painted Guernica. Its people stand motionless in doorways. They laugh or weep but don't shout. What's left out is as shocking as the ellipses in Kiarostami movies, but what you notice most about Gopalakrishnan's film of distant voices and still lives is what Gaston Bachelard called the poetics of space – he films in his own family



Living history: 'Man of the Story'

home, and has his cinematographer Ravi Varma photograph balconies, windows and bedsteads in shallow focus, as if they are Garbo's face. Where most American, Chinese or Indian filmmakers telling epic stories show us vistas, crowds and period details, Gopalakrishnan is drawn to faces, the light in kids' eyes, the 40 shades of green in monsoon Kerala.

Some will find the acting not to their taste, but these are the same people who admire Pudovkin and Sirk. Seen as a form of Kathakali – a dance form that Gopalakrishnan loves – or as a reaction against Bollywood razzmatazz, this quietly autobiographical, state-of-the-nation film is a tonal masterpiece. No wonder Satyajit Ray called Gopalakrishnan his favourite Indian director.

**Disc:** Paula Nightingale's fine interview with the director is included on the disc, while Suranjan Ganguly's detailed booklet essay tells us all we need to know about the political backdrop.

## MY SON JOHN

Leo McCarey; US 1952; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 122 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

### Reviewed by Peter Tonguette

Who would have guessed that Leo McCarey's anti-communist jeremiad *My Son John* would one day look ahead of its time? The premise seems quaint at first: John Jefferson (Robert Walker) works for the US government but has become bewitched by communism, putting him at odds with his parents (Dean Jagger and Helen Hayes), solid Republicans both. But as critic Tag Gallagher has pointed out, McCarey "pays absolutely no attention to communism", and indeed in conversation with Peter Bogdanovich at the end of the 1960s (as recounted in Bogdanovich's book *Who the Devil Made It*) the director explained his aims in quite general terms, applicable to any age and far removed from the red-baiting intentions ascribed to him: "I was trying to give a very authentic portrayal of a father who worked and slaved to make enough money to send his son through college... The father educated the son and the son was ashamed of the father." Perhaps McCarey chose communism as his bogeyman simply to be contemporary; swap it with today's pernicious academic fads (like postmodernism) and watch how relevant the film becomes. It is at least as relevant as *Make Way for Tomorrow*, McCarey's 1937 film about parents and children, now regarded as a classic.

McCarey depicts higher education as a Pandora's box: worthwhile in itself but apt to unleash insufferable pretensions. In John's case, it also reveals an unremittingly cruel streak. McCarey agreed with Bogdanovich that the film's flag-waving father was meant to appear "slightly ridiculous", but John laughs at him even when he isn't. Worse, he condescends to his sweet, doting mother Lucille; when he attempts to explain his Marxist beliefs to her, it sounds as if he is reading a storybook to a small child. In the best scene, Lucille sings John the lullaby of the title ("Deedle, deedle, dumpling, my son John"), fumbling for signs of the old John, but instead of sharing her reverie he says coldly, "Do it again,"



# New releases

◀ mother." The genius of the moment is that McCarey overdoes neither John's barb (it is easy to miss his sarcasm) nor Lucille's reaction (she is hurt but doesn't lash out as his father would). We can see why Jean Renoir said that McCarey "understands people better perhaps than anyone else in Hollywood".

John fancies himself above his family's middle-class habits, which is ironic because there is nothing jejune about Lucille. She has spunk, good-naturedly accepting teasing from John's Korean War-bound brothers, who tell her that they'll bring her back an opium pipe. And though she is pious she has no trouble shoving the family priest aside when she wants to walk arm-in-arm with her sons out of church. With her fast, birdlike gestures, Hayes is a marvel, and McCarey gets his best effects with her (such as when her small head disappears inside a car door as she hugs her sons goodbye). Walker (whose last film this was) is best in a subtle register, as when he uses the word "thesis" in conversation with his father before quickly slipping in a simpler synonym, "subject", to make sure the dullard knows what he's talking about.

The film eventually settles into a tiresome spy plot, with stocky Van Heflin as an FBI agent in pursuit of John, which is wholly redundant (as well as extremely silly). An attorney before he got into movies, McCarey would know that the 'alienation of affections' within the family is the most damaging ripple effect caused by John's communism. And today's youth will surely see themselves in John the next time they namedrop Derrida at the kitchen table. **Disc:** A handsome transfer of McCarey's final black-and-white, Academy-ratio film.

## RUMBLE FISH

Francis Coppola; US 1983; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: director's commentary, documentaries ('On Location in Tulsa', 'The Percussion-Based Score'), music and effects track, deleted scenes, trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Thirty-odd years ago whoever would have guessed that this would be one of Francis Coppola's best post-1980 features? Out of its original Brat Pack-kickstarting *Koyaanisqatsi*-borrowing context it looks much more like what Coppola surely intended from the outset: exactly the kind of breathlessly pretentious arthouse flick that a bookish teenager high on Camus and expressionism would make himself, if only he had the technical and financial wherewithal to imprint his highfalutin dreams on to celluloid. Naturally, it's in black-and-white (how could it be otherwise?), with almost every shot self-consciously composed as though it's a panel in a graphic novel. The overbearing symbolism (time-lapse clouds, speeded-up clocks, doves fluttering in front of teens about to beat each other to a bloody pulp in elegantly choreographed quasi-dance moves) recalls Coppola's beloved Abel Gance, and yet – as with Gance – disbelief is just about sufficiently suspended for the duration.

Already inspired casting has become more iconic with the passage of time, particularly



**Motorcycle emptiness: 'Rumble Fish'**

in the case of an achingly young-looking Mickey Rourke as the Motorcycle Boy, the embodiment of unattainable cool that Matt Dillon's tormented younger brother Rusty-James can only dream about becoming (with Dennis Hopper as their sozzled dad, is it any wonder their lives are so dysfunctional?), who knows that his life is hurtling towards a dead end and the traditional beautiful corpse.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray transfer isn't quite as pin-sharp as this label's usual stellar efforts but it's certainly the best the film has looked since its 35mm circulation. Indeed, it's better in one respect: the shots of the colour 'rumble fish' are no longer as jarring, since the black-and-white background has been more seamlessly matched to the surrounding footage. Most of the extras, including Coppola's affectionate commentary (he's very fond of his ugly duckling), have been ported over from the 2005 US DVD release, though the booklet is new to this edition, containing a lengthy Coppola interview from 1983 and the original production notes. Another novelty is a separate music and effects soundtrack, which when combined with optional subtitles serves to emphasise the film's visual roots in silent cinema – something that would be even more true of Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* a decade later.

## TWINS OF EVIL

John Hough; UK 1971; Synapse Films/Dual Format Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 87 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'The Flesh and the Fury: X-Posing Twins of Evil' and 'The Props That Hammer Built: The Kinsey Collection', deleted scene, isolated music and effects track, trailer, TV spots

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Live at the witch trials, the 17th century. Set in a Pinewood Studios Mitteleuropa, the



**Double trouble: 'Twins of Evil'**

capstone of Hammer's Karnstein Trilogy (which also includes *The Vampire Lovers* and *Lust for a Vampire*) begins with two orphaned Venetian girls, Frieda and Maria, being delivered into the care of their puritan Uncle Gustav (Peter Cushing, who'll gasp the title line).

Gustav happens to be the local witch-hunting inquisitor, routinely night-riding to roast the sexually active for suspected sorcery – a nightmare guardian for two such ripely buxom teens. How are you going to keep them on the farm once they've seen Venice? The twins are immediately chastened for abandoning mourning black too soon, setting up a timeless clash between dark, senescent repression and bright, blossoming, youthful display. ("[Cushing's] performance is so convincing that maybe his next role should be Malcolm Muggeridge," wrote one waggish contemporary critic.) *Playboy*'s first twin Playmates of the Month in 1970 and thus avatars of liberation, pulchritudinous Mary and Madeleine Collinson play Maria and Frieda. The latter finds herself particularly drawn by the glam allure of Damien Thomas's Count Karnstein, who practises untold debauchery in a castle atop a hill licked by optically printed tongues of lightning.

The period setting and religious sadism call to mind Michael Reeves's 1968 Suffolk western *Witchfinder General* but, aside from the lesser directorial acumen of *Twins*' John Hough, there's one important difference between these films. Though weedy Uncle Gustav is shown to be mistaken in his methods, his mission is ultimately a holy one, for Satan is real, Karnstein is a homicidal satanist and he does imbue himself with vampiric powers. *Twins* may be Hammer's belated attempt to plug into the sexual revolution, but the film doesn't announce any discernible loyalty in the struggle, the last reel of wholesale butchery leaving a smouldering wreckage of absolute moral chaos.

**Disc:** *Twins of Evil* is beautifully burnished without losing texture, sharing space on a cram-packed Blu-ray with a slickly produced feature-length documentary covering everything you've ever wanted to know about lesbian vampires, generously illustrated with girl-on-girl petting.

## UKRAINIAN RE-VISION

*The Man with a Movie Camera/In Spring/Zvenyhora/Perekop/Two Days/Night Coachman*

Dziga Vertov/Mikhail Kaufman/Oleksandr Dovzhenko/Ivan Kavaleridze/Heorhii Stabovyi/Heorhii Tasin; USSR 1927-30; Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre/Region-free DVD; 64/54/68/50/57/56 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: multiple scores on some titles, poster artwork, bilingual book

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

This six-film package is part of an ongoing effort by Ukraine's national film archive to raise awareness of specifically Ukrainian silent cinema made when the USSR was increasingly imposing its own pan-Soviet cultural values on regional film output. Polemically, the project also seeks to reclaim the Ukrainian nationality of familiar titles such as Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *The Man with a Movie Camera* (number

eight in the 2012 *S&S* poll of the greatest films ever made) and Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Zvenyhora* (1927) (to give the preferred Ukrainian transliteration of both the director and film title, as listed in the DVD packaging). The latter, better known as *Zvenigora*, was already explicitly Ukrainian in its celebration of the country's history, but this new version restores what is believed to be Dovzhenko's preferred Ukrainian intertitles. Claiming *The Man with a Movie Camera* for Ukraine initially seems more of a stretch, but the film was indeed made for Odessa-based studio VUFKU after the project was rejected by Sovkino in Moscow, and was shot in Odessa, Kyiv and Kharkiv.

These are paired with similar but much less familiar titles. The sculptor-filmmaker Ivan Kavaleridze's *Perekop* (1930) is a poetic fantasy commemorating the tenth anniversary of the historically significant capture of the town of Perekop by the Red Army. Narrative incident comes second to explicit agitprop, and while the elaborate Soviet-style montages are occasionally thrilling, the film as a whole demands lengthy footnotes for non-Ukrainian viewers (happily provided by the accompanying book). Mikhail Kaufman's almost wordless *In Spring* (1929) is much more accessible and indeed wholly delightful: this non-narrative study of the coming of spring and its effects on nature and industry alike favours whimsical wit over political comment. (This version reinstates the sarcastically deployed footage of religious ceremonies that was cut from many export prints.)

The two fiction films included in this collection – Heorhii Stabovy's *Two Days* (1927) and Heorhii Tasin's *Night Coachman* (1928) – are both psychological melodramas about a father's conflicted emotions after making unwelcome discoveries about his offspring's political activities. In *Two Days*, a faithful old retainer has to reconcile his loyalty to his aristocratic employees (whose hastily abandoned mansion he's charged with guarding) with love for his long-lost son, now a high-ranking commissar. The protagonist of *Night Coachman* finds himself in a similar bind after he discovers his daughter's subversive revolutionary activities. In both cases the resulting mental torment is depicted via methods that owe more to Murnau than Eisenstein, with the night coachman's frequently breakneck journeys paralleling his full-scale mental breakdown.

**Discs:** Given their age and preservation history, the transfers are generally very watchable indeed (*Night Coachman* has the most pronounced damage). All the films get at least one newly recorded soundtrack, while *Perekop* also gets its original-release accompaniment, and *The Man with a Movie Camera* offers two recent recordings plus the 1999 *In the Nursery* track that accompanied the first BFI DVD release. The scores generally work extremely well, although little attempt has been made to emulate conventional silent-film scoring: percussive electronic effects abound. The most substantial extra is an extensively illustrated 360-page book in Ukrainian and English, which provides a huge amount of contextual material.



## Les Vampires

A Feuillade experience is a stalk through a corridor of wakeful dreaming, of poetic fugue states and otherworldly evocations

### LES VAMPIRES

Louis Feuillade; France 1915-16; Kino Classics/Region A Blu-ray; 417 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: trailer for Kino release of 'Fantômas'

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Long the hero only of hardcore silent-film missionaries – the kind who could and would seek out theatrical screenings of six-hour French serials made during WWI – Louis Feuillade has seen his popularity rise with the accessibility of the digital-video and internet era, and the age-old classic story about how film style developed is getting shakier with each passing year. No longer do we knee jerk in the direction of D.W. Griffith as the ultimate grandfather of cinema, however much his methodology – syntax engineered to control and manipulate the viewer's attention, largely – has proven to be the more powerful and financially viable avenue. But Feuillade's opposite tack, relying on depth and *mise en scène* to 'present' the action, which unrolls at its own pace, not the pace dictated by the editing strategies, is acquiring momentum almost a century after its manifestation. At the very least it has become easy to place him as the legacy ancestor of what became 'art cinema', running thereafter from Murnau to Renoir, Ozu, Welles, Ophuls, Antonioni et al. A Feuillade experience isn't merely an accrual of narrative blocks but a stalk through a corridor of wakeful dreaming, of poetic fugue states and vicarious connectivity and otherworldly evocations.

As such, his masterpiece *Les Vampires* needs little introduction, and its arrival on Blu-ray is a gift from the movie gods. Here the potentially never-ending Chinese-box saga of Guérande, Mazamette, Irma Vep and her criminal Vampire gang, mastered in HD from the 1996

Cinémathèque Française restoration, feels more thoroughly modern than ever, even as Griffith's innovative crosscutting (not to mention his conservative sensibility) creaks with arthritis. It may take young cinephiles a while to realise that the film's hypnotic quality occurs via the static frame and medium distance, not despite them. Feuillade's Paris is an old, opulent, sunlit Euro-metropolis often mysteriously barren of people and yet harbouring secret societies, schemes, identities and connections. But the force of its seduction is entirely contingent on the camera's fixed and patient gaze – as the actors 'pretend' the story in what's close to real time, the city's streets and parlour rooms harbour vacuums and vacancies and the ideas of hidden things behind doors, paintings, windows or moving wall panels. Your eyes roam these odd places instead of the director telling you where to look, and the absences are brimming with anxiety. Your watching becomes part of the story, joining the mysterious pursuits and tightening the pull of tenterhooks.

Cinema has been peddled to us for more than a century as an instrument of clarity and omniscience. But that's its Jekyll mode – just as powerful is the repressed persona as a mystifier, a gnostic mission we undergo and through which we come to understand the world as being more complex and less definable than we may tend to prefer. This is Feuillade's cinema-as-truth, when the medium becomes an experience celebrating the fact that the truth is unknowable. *Les Vampires* is pop cinema, a landmark, a barrelful of monkeys, a missile of antique coolness, but it's also a profound act of cinema.

**Discs:** Sparkling transfer and Blu-ray delivery.

# Television

## CASANOVA '73

BBC; UK 1973; Acorn Media/Region 2 DVD; 224 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: Leslie Phillips interview, stills gallery

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

Time to fire up the lava lamp and break out the polyester suits for this Galton and Simpson sitcom, subtitled 'The Adventures of a 20th-Century Libertine', with Leslie Phillips as PR executive Henry Newhouse (the surname is a rough translation from the Italian of 'Casanova'). Although he's married to a reasonably forbearing wife (Jan Holden), fear of ageing (the opening episode shows his panic at the mere possibility of a greying pubic hair) sees Newhouse relentlessly chasing any woman he meets, usually with embarrassing if not exactly hilarious results. His conquests include an air hostess ultimately eaten by crocodiles, his business partner's wife and a chirrupy fire-eating stripper (played by Maureen Lipman). But eventually even his libido gives out and the series 'climaxes' with two episodes in which he has to face the possibility of becoming impotent.

Had it been screened on ITV, home of saucier (and blunter) comedies such as *On the Buses* (1969-73) and *Love Thy Neighbour* (1972-76), the show (bizarrely first scheduled earlier in the evening than *The Goodies*) might have had a longer run. However, Mary Whitehouse targeted it (Josephine Tewson even plays a character not unlike her, which can't have helped), so the 1973 series was all there was.

**Discs:** The main extra is a new 15-minute interview with Leslie Phillips.

## THE INVISIBLE MAN

Silverton Productions/Universal/NBC; US 1975-76; Visual Entertainment/Region-free Blu-ray; 653 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

Legend has it that Universal Studios recruited Steven Bochco the day after he finished college, training him up as a writer and producer by assigning him to anything that came along, mostly rewriting unsold pilots to pad them out to TV-movie length for overseas sales or remaking older movies from their library.

There is certainly a warmed-over feeling about this H.G. Wells update, Bochco's pilot script even reusing the structure he had just borrowed (from Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder) for his 1973 update of *Double Indemnity*, with our recently shot invisible protagonist narrating his story in flashback for the benefit of his absent best friend. Later Bochco episodes would cheekily steal whole plots and settings from the Bond movie *Diamonds Are Forever* (Las Vegas, Howard Hughes, voice impersonation, energy crisis) and the mixed-race-prisoners-chained-together scenario from *The Defiant Ones* (1958), though neither was a Universal property. The closest the series comes to Wells's original conception of a madman on the loose seeking revenge on society comes in the unlikely shape of 'Power Play', a cost-saving 'bottle' episode by Leslie Stevens using only one guest star (Monte Markham), standing sets and clips from previous instalments, as the



**Casanova '73** Leslie Phillips plays PR executive Henry Newhouse, whose fear of ageing sees him relentlessly chasing any woman he meets

regulars are forced to defend their activities in face of a crazed gunman who wants the secret to the 'Klae Resource', no matter what it is.

Throughout it all, David McCallum makes for a diffident hero, a scientist working on teleportation who lucks across an invisibility process. Rather than have it weaponised by the US military, he uses it irreversibly on himself and then destroys it. Melinda O. Fee has plenty of spunk as his glamorous wife, and highlights of each episode are usually presaged by a lewd look from her as her husband removes face masks and trousers to reveal nothing underneath. Despite the sexual undertone, this gimmick show for kids was too daft and undemanding even in the 1970s and was cancelled mid-season; it was quickly retooled as *The Gemini Man*, with Ben Murphy, though with no better results.

**Disc:** Despite the basic 35mm materials being in excellent shape, the presentation is woeful. To create a faux-widescreen image, the pilot has been vertically squeezed throughout, making everyone look short and fat. The actual series episodes fare slightly better, being merely cropped top and bottom. There are no extras – hardly surprising given that all 13 episodes have been fitted on to a single Blu-ray disc.

## WILFRED – SEASON 1

Renegade/AFC/Film Victoria/SBS One; Australia 2007; Fabulous Film/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: deleted scenes, crew montage, stills gallery

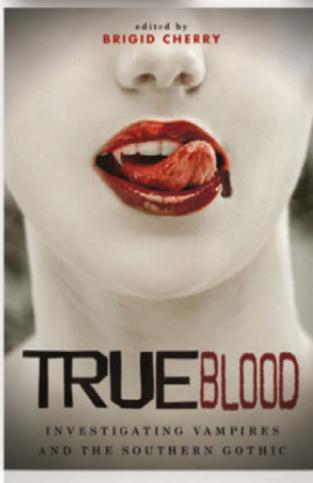
**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

Territoriality and the dangers of pet anthropomorphism are the themes of this darkly surreal Australian comedy series, which plays like a demented commingling of the Pinter/Losey role-reversal drama *The Servant* (1963) and *Harvey* (1950), replacing the latter's giant bunny with a man in a dog costume.

Co-writer Jason Gann stars as the eponymous foul-mouthed, nacho-munching, beer-chugging, bong-sucking pooch, determined to sabotage the relationship between his owner Sarah (Cindy Waddingham) and her insecure new boyfriend Adam (Adam Zwar, who co-scripts). Expanded from a 2002 short film (which makes up the first seven minutes of the first episode), what could have been a one-joke sketch is expanded to include a highly amusing 'dog in prison' spoof in which Wilfred is caught without a collar and put on death row.

**Disc:** The pallor and grain of the 16mm source are ably reproduced on video. The 15 minutes of extras include deleted material and behind-the-scenes footage.

# Read



## TRUE BLOOD

Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic

Edited by Brigid Cherry, I.B. Tauris, 232pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781848859401  
As seen in HBO's *True Blood*, vampires have never been more edgy, gory or sexy. Since its arrival on screen in 2008, Alan Ball's adaptation of *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris has exploited the creative freedoms of the HBO brand and captured a cult audience with its passionate, blood-drenched visuals and stories.

This book considers the representations of sexuality, race and class in a series that engages directly with prejudice and civil rights. It also considers *True Blood's* generic roots in television horror, paranormal romance and Southern Gothic, the wider contexts of fairy tales and religion, the marketing of the series and the activities of its fans.

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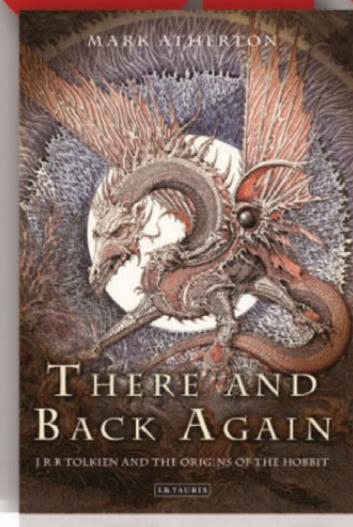
## WHAT IF I HAD BEEN THE HERO?

Investigating Women's Cinema

By Sue Thornham, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 248pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781844573639

What happens when women tell their own stories in film? *What If I Had Been the Hero?* addresses this question through an exploration of a wide range of works by filmmakers including Sally Potter, Jane Campion, Deepa Mehta, Patricia Rozema and Lynne Ramsay. Not content to take the 'post-feminist' makeover film or the figure of the 'action chick' as evidence of women's increased power and status, Sue Thornham raises key issues about women as authors, subjects and heroes of their narratives. Drawing on a wide range of feminist theoretical sources, this book makes an important intervention into contemporary debates, situating filmmaking within a rich history of female creativity.

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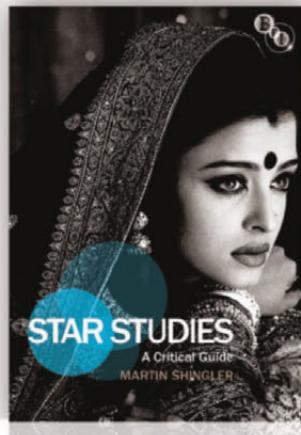
## THERE AND BACK AGAIN

J.R.R. Tolkien and the Origins of The Hobbit

By Mark Atherton, I.B. Tauris, 320pp, hardback, £20, ISBN 9781780762463

For all Tolkien's global fame and the familiarity of modern culture with Gandalf, Bilbo, Frodo and Sam, the sources of the great mythmaker's own mythmaking have been neglected. Mark Atherton here explores the chief influences on Tolkien's work: his boyhood in the West Midlands; the landscapes and seascapes which shaped his mythologies; his experiences in World War I; his interest in Scandinavian myth; his friendships, especially with the other Oxford-based Inklings; and the relevance of his themes, especially ecological themes, to the present day. *There and Back Again* offers a unique guide to the varied inspirations behind Tolkien's life and work, and sheds new light on how a legend is born.

[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)



## STAR STUDIES

A Critical Guide

By Martin Shingler, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 240pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574902

*Star Studies: A Critical Guide* provides a lively introduction to the major approaches and key developments within this key area of film studies. It identifies a number of dominant themes, explains major theories, concepts and methodologies, and explores the diversity of approaches that have helped shape the international study of stars and stardom. Comparing the stars and star systems of Hollywood, Bollywood, China and many European countries, from the early 20th century to the first decade of the 21st, Martin Shingler considers the multiple functions of stars: as an elite workforce within the film industry, as actors and performers, as role models and cultural representatives, as icons and images, as transnational and national symbols, and as commodities.

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# ELEGY FOR A DREAM

## THE BIG SCREEN

The Story of the Movies and What They Did to Us

By David Thomson, Allen Lane, 608pp, £25, ISBN 9781846143144

### Reviewed by Kent Jones

Midway through David Thomson's new "story of the movies", I thought of it as an occasionally windy but enjoyable tour through the most familiar stops in film history in general and Thomsoniania in particular. By the time I finished it, enjoyment and amusement had given way to exultation.

This is a stirring rumination on the past, present and future of cinema. It is a book that is, in so many ways, from beginning to end, at odds with itself, and I love it not despite but because of exactly that. "You have to wait for the ending," Thomson writes in his introduction, yet *The Big Screen* resolves itself not as a narrative but as a soaring musical composition in which facts and quotations harmonise with unreasonable opinions and exquisitely tuned emotions.

Along the way, this famously conflicted author works past his one-time ambivalence about being a naturalised American ("I am probably not American enough to diagnose this country from the inside. Yet I am no longer English enough to be an outsider") and, quite movingly, his long-held and oft-expressed disappointment with the cinema. "This is a love story," he tells us, and many pages later he supposes it to be "a love letter to a lost love". Indeed it is, and a crazily beautiful one at that.

As a history of screens "from Muybridge through Facebook", *The Big Screen* often feels like a detailed update of one of those old popular histories such as Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer's 1957 book *The Movies*, albeit without illustrations and from the point of view of a questing intelligence which alights throughout on little scintillations of insight, consuming interest and sheer adoration.

At certain junctures, things get perilously breezy. There is quite a bit of stitching and jumping from one director or film to another with phrases such as "and one more...", as well as a great deal of free-associative leap-frogging: in one dizzy stretch, from Godard and Anna Karina to Warhol and Edie Sedgwick to Jeanne Moreau (because she allegedly "could have been Edie's mother, if she'd had the child at 15") to *La notte* to Antonioni.

There are a few careless errors sprinkled here and there. Criterion deserves credit for a great deal, but a Méliès box-set is not among its achievements – the distinction belongs to Serge Bromberg in France and Flicker Alley in the States; Michael Curtiz and not Raoul Walsh directed Errol Flynn in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

There are also lunging suppositions that fall short of the mark: the notion that Chekhov's plays were a precursor to cinema, a claim Thomson bases on the opening stage directions of *Uncle Vanya*, which are as

specific about time, place and mood as those of, say, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and many other plays of a similar vintage; or the insistence, not once but twice, that there was no actual massacre on the Odessa Steps, as if Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and the medium itself had been caught red-handed. (The actual event, which occurred at night in mid-June of 1905, was not a massacre of innocents but a violent suppression of civil disorder – I would file that under 'dramatic licence'.) On the other hand, there is a lot of publicly known connective tissue that has been left out. For instance, Thomson makes an issue of the artifice in *Bicycle Thieves*, but fails to mention the fact that non-professional Lamberto

Maggiorani was dubbed by a seasoned actor.

There is quite a bit of torquing and squeezing in order to get the facts to conform to certain of Thomson's long-cherished notions, such as his insistence on *film noir* as an epochal shift in American cultural history. On one level, there's no argument, but Thomson weights the genre with so much significance that its appearance in post-war America seems to be *the* – rather than a – turning point. I agree that the *noir* sensibility pervaded the musical as well as the crime film, but the sense of loss embodied in the "wistful moments and soliloquies" of songs such as 'Love Is Here to Stay' (written in 1938) or 'All of You' provide flimsy evidence: no one has ever had to strain to hear that particular



Cellophane gleam: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in 'Swing Time'

emotional colouring in those compositions or several hundred others in the Great American Songbook, let alone needed a *noir*-skeleton key. I have no problem with classifying *The Night of the Hunter* as *noir*-related, but the claim that it has nothing “hopeful” to say “about the world or America” is just plain wrong (if the Lillian Gish character’s valiant protection of the children in her charge and their restoration of faith isn’t hopeful, I don’t know what is).

There is also an unfortunate resort to the ideal that sometimes feels like a holdover from the film criticism of James Agee: the WWI movie *The Big Parade* is chided for lacking the outrage found in Picasso’s *Guernica*; *The Godfather Part II* falls short as a “proper critique of America” because Coppola and Puzo didn’t dare to envision the execution of Diane Keaton’s Kay.

And then there’s the old problem of ‘movie’, that fatally addictive elixir consumed by billions, concocted from a base of ‘story’ blended with ‘money’. Thomson goes a long way towards both refining and elaborating this concept here, but it still gives me trouble. Just as *noir* is envisioned as an irrevocable turn of the page in the Book of Life, the inauguration of ‘movie’ becomes, in Thomson’s cosmology, a second Big Bang. “In a hundred years, the movies have done so much to dissolve our resistance to murder,” he writes of the plotted murder that doesn’t occur in Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927). I suppose that’s true, but it might be worth alluding to the fact that Murnau and his writer Carl Mayer had several hundred thousand similarly themed novels, plays, operas, epic poems and legends at their backs.

The book is heavily salted with final reckonings about “the whole duplicity” of the fictional movie image, descriptions of dazed directors left in a state of terminal “confusion”, musings over whether we’re nothing more than “helpless victims of the light”, and mind-bending rhetorical questions. “Don’t movies affect us?” asks Thomson. “Don’t we want them to move us? Aren’t we talking about one of the most profound appeals to desire the human race has ever created out of nothing?” I mean, like, yeah... *sort of*. But don’t we want the same from literature and music and painting and theatre, all equally miraculous and all similarly invented out of “nothing”?

Coleridge, without hyperbole, famously called this “poetic faith”: a “willing suspension of disbelief” which conjures “shadows of imagination” made possible by a sufficient amount of “human interest and a semblance of truth”. Contrary to the assertions of Virginia Woolf (whose essay ‘The Cinema’ is quoted in the book) – and, on occasion, Thomson himself – those shadows were not made literal, but rather afforded another expressive medium with the invention of moving images. The idea that movies came along and blasted every previous artform out of the water with the promise of a hypnotically induced alternate reality simply doesn’t wash – such notions assume a sponge-brained viewing public whose members are wholly lacking in self-awareness. People do indeed have a tendency to be mesmerised or to ensconce themselves in fictional worlds, sometimes in large numbers and for lengthy periods of time, only to be jolted to a new level of awareness by a tragedy, a walk in the woods or a realisation. And as Bresson



The end of the line: Kay (Diane Keaton) and Michael (Al Pacino) in ‘The Godfather Part II’

showed us at the end of *Pickpocket*, realisations do tend to arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. To his credit, Thomson is aware of the Human Factor, otherwise known as Life, which is neatly elided in so much of the depressing stuff that continues to fill the Cultural Theory sections of America’s few remaining bookstores.

Thomson is no more a theorist than Godard is a historian, and both are always ready to drop consistency in the pursuit of poetry. Around the halfway mark of *The Big Screen*, the lighter-than-air rhythm and tone of the enterprise take hold (“The book... has opinions,” writes Thomson in the introduction, “none of which is meant to be authoritative or decisive” – that’s not just rhetoric), and the movement through 20th-century cinema and related history acquires a sun-dappled energy. The rhetoric about movie-as-mass-hypnosis becomes just one of many voices and moods that dissolve in the light of Thomson’s eloquent descriptions of the beauty of the film image, currently rivalled only by those of Geoffrey O’Brien.

Thomson has been looking at nitrate prints with film-preservation donor David Packard, to whom the book is dedicated, and he’s been making the most of the experience judging from his lovely evocations of the Astaire-Rogers movies (which, Thomson writes so aptly, “take place on sets that resemble hardened cellophane, or film stock”), of the young Deborah Kerr “with auburn hair and in a cornflower-blue dress, in shadow and firelight” in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, and of the “vibrato” of the suddenly tilted camera in *Brief Encounter*. Of panchromatic black and white, he writes: “It is one of the finest inventions America ever made, and then it was largely abandoned.” I second that emotion.

Thomson has always been exquisitely attuned to the passage of time, alternately cruel

*It is the passionate lament of a lifelong film lover who stands dismayed at the cheapening of the moving image*

and poignant. The final melancholy section of *The Big Screen* is the passionate lament of a lifelong film lover who stands dismayed at the cheapening of the moving image which began with filmed commercial interruptions (“the cancer of western civilisation,” wrote Thomson’s hero Jean Renoir), and the subsequent and increasingly rapid acceleration of the audiovisual-entertainment industry away from that thing we call cinema. “You can still sense the marvel of having this shining version of reality there before you as a plaything and a philosophy,” he writes of cinema’s heyday. “It was a time in which the mere act of looking and wanting to see possessed an innocence and an energy. It seemed like a way of growing up. How lucky to be alive then and there.”

Far from another dour pronouncement of the end of cinema, Thomson’s is a remarkably clear-headed elegy, anchored by an acknowledgment of his own ageing and his lack of harmony with the latest “technological developments” away from movie-watching. (“The technology is so potent and dynamic now,” he writes, “that ‘entertainment’ can run very close to social stability and political unease. Not every nation wants a ‘Spring.’”)

Thomson has arrived at a new-found generosity of spirit towards serious filmmaking in general and specific filmmakers who have given him trouble in the past, such as Kubrick, Malick, Ford and Scorsese. He provides a model of cinephilia that is at once more literate, enlightened, expansive and politically sophisticated than what has become the standard model (in whose precincts the word ‘political’ is swung blindly through the air like a baseball bat at a piñata party). And Thomson’s account of the spread of American commercialism and its terrible consequences is as lucid and succinct as any I’ve read.

There was a period when I wondered why Thomson continued to write about movies – it was as if he had become ashamed of his former love. In *The Big Screen*, I think he’s regained that love, at long last, as he comes to terms with the fact that its object has been gradually dematerialising before his ageing eyes. ☀

## J. EDGAR HOOVER GOES TO THE MOVIES

The FBI and the Origins of Hollywood's Cold War

By John Sbardellati, Cornell University Press, 264pp, £17.50, ISBN 9780801450082

### Reviewed by J. Hoberman

Why J. Edgar Hoover and why now? Is it because – thanks to the internet's unlimited capacity to giveth-and-taketh-away – we live in a world of total surveillance and simultaneous transparency? A fascination with the power so long concentrated in one deeply disturbed individual? A reaction against the incessant clamour of hypocritical piety and patriotic bushwah? Blowback from the War on Terror? The realisation that, in all probability, Barack Obama would have been Hoover's personal public enemy number one?

America's erstwhile top cop and greatest snoop, creator and, for nearly five decades, personification of the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been dead 40 years and yet his reanimated corpse walks among us – sometimes, *pace* Clint Eastwood, in a dress. Eastwood's 2011 biopic *J. Edgar* was followed by Tim Weiner's massive history *Enemies: A History of the FBI*, now in its third printing. Seth Rosenfeld's just published (even longer) *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* uses files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to detail the alliance between Hoover and his one-time informant, California governor Ronald Reagan.

John Sbardellati's *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies* reads FOIA files to provide the backstory – how the FBI employed then-actor Reagan, among many others, to purge post-World War II Hollywood of its alleged Communist fifth column.

Given what is redacted on the page and eliminated from a request, parsing FOIA files is an exercise in frustration. It's like panning for gold: you have to read between the lines. Everyone owes a debt to academic Daniel Leab, who was the first to request and make public a sizeable chunk of the FBI's Hollywood files. And so far as I know, Sbardellati is the first to explicate the files on individual movies that the FBI kept in the mid-1940s.

The Bureau regarded the 1943 movie *Mission to Moscow*, Hollywood's most notorious valentine to America's new wartime ally, as the Communists' "crowning achievement", and its own role in exposing it as a Pyrrhic victory. They had tipped off the Reds and, thereafter, communist propaganda would be more subtle and dangerous. Thus *Hoover Goes to the Movies* begins with the FBI briefing against *It's a Wonderful Life* (a movie not only conspicuously hostile to bankers but worked on by a number of politically suspicious characters) and ends with an appendix sampling other FBI reviews. These range from the "unnecessarily class-conscious" 1947 Abbott and Costello comedy *Buck Privates Come Home* (which was in fact co-written by at least one Red) to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. "[Name redacted] described the plot as being symbolical of the downfall of the bourgeois."

Many of these reports were likely filed



Test of allegiance: 'I Was a Communist for the FBI'

by aspiring screenwriter Ayn Rand, who subsequently furnished the Bureau with another analytical tool, her anonymous pamphlet *Screen Guide for Americans*. But, as Hoover realised, film criticism was subjective; political associations, on the other hand, could be established and used to uncover further associations, and thus an entire conspiracy. The FBI shifted gears, and began to funnel information to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The 1947 HUAC hearings shone a spotlight on Hollywood's most prominent Communists and succeeded in creating a blacklist and intimidating Hollywood liberals, but its later and less publicised hearings in 1951 and 1953 were far more damaging. Careers were smashed and lives ruined. Meanwhile timorous studios demonstrated their loyalty with lugubrious quasi-noirs such as 1955's *I Was a Communist for the FBI*. "How influential were these Red-scare films?" Sbardellati asks, before answering his own question: "One can detect the G-men's high hopes and dashed expectations for these movies throughout the FBI's files."

Ronald Reagan declared victory in 1951, but as Sbardellati writes: "Rather than reveling in the almost total exclusion of Communists from the film industry, the FBI continued to focus on threats." (The Larry Edmunds Bookshop in Los Angeles was one.) Still, by 1956 – the year when Arthur Miller defied HUAC and Elvis Presley gave America's moral police something

**'It's a Wonderful Life', conspicuously hostile to bankers, was worked on by a number of politically suspicious characters**

new over which to obsess – the charade was finished. In 1956, 1957 and 1958, blacklisted writers using fronts and pseudonyms won Oscars for their screenplays; in 1959, Kirk Douglas and Otto Preminger each garnered maximum publicity by hiring blacklist kingpin Dalton Trumbo under his own name.

The seven-year Red Scare is often, and was even then, characterised as a "witch hunt" – a charge refuted on the grounds that, while witches were imaginary, Communists and Soviet spies were not. The latter, however, were exceedingly rare, especially in southern California. Sbardellati doesn't even waste a footnote on the one actual Soviet agent operating in Hollywood, penny-ante producer and eventual FBI stoolie Boris Morros.

In a way, the title of Sbardellati's book is a misnomer. Whether or not Hoover actually went to the movies is irrelevant. The fact is that he saw them as a source of moral contagion and mortal danger as far back as 1922, when the newly created FBI reported Charles Chaplin hosting a reception for Communist leader William Z. Foster. More generally Hoover, along with sundry political reactionaries, realised that movies were an innate force for social change. The medium was a natural source of cheap thrills, a vehicle for underdog fantasy, a fount of democratic rhubarb emanating from an industry rife with foreigners and non-Christians that, merely by trying to put on a good show and make a buck, forever altered America's consumption habits, gender relations, sexual mores and sense of fair play.

*Hoover Goes to the Movies* is the story of a battle for the dream life of the nation. If there had been no Communists in Hollywood, the G-Man would have had to invent them – and, in a sense, he did just that. ❶

## WHAT IF I HAD BEEN THE HERO?

Investigating Women's Cinema

By Sue Thornham, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 248pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781844573639

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

For 25 years, Sue Thornham has charted feminist film theory: her 1999 anthology *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* remains the standard textbook. *What If I Had Been the Hero?* is conceived as a companion to 1997's *Passionate Detachments*, bringing filmmaking rather than theoretical discussions to the fore. Ranging from neglected documentaries that predated the formulation of feminist theory (such as Joyce Chopra's *Joyce at 34*) to emerging auteurs such as Lucrecia Martel, Thornham surveys the field of women's cinema, wherein both female filmmakers and their protagonists are still faced with the vexed question of the title.

To be the hero (or the filmmaker) means to take up a masculine position, and to repeat a masculinist narrative. On the other hand, Thornham argues, the avant-garde counter-cinema envisioned by Laura Mulvey could not fully contest the narrative paradigms that she perceives as shaping the viewer's unconscious. Films such as Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979) – from which Thornham takes the book's title – couldn't change these dominant paradigms because their formal language can only "gestur[e] towards the possibilities" rather than actualise them.

Instead, Thornham curates a narrative counter-counter-cinema that exists within the interstices of the mainstream. Presenting psychoanalytic readings that draw on theorists such as Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis, she identifies threads (her image) that connect Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002) to Kathryn Bigelow's *The Weight of Water* (2000). Both films work to undo mainstream narrative – even as they insist that their protagonists can take up heroic positions within it. They present the female protagonist as an investigative writer; they re-vision fairytales and myths in order to displace the archetypal figure of Woman; and they disrupt linear temporal progress through an expansion of attention to space.

Several of the films that Thornham considers also focus on a generative mother-daughter relationship – a relationship that she views psychoanalytically, whether within a film's narrative or within the narrative of feminist film history, in which the theorist simultaneously searches for the lost mother (of a feminist film heyday) while watching the "Cinema of the Daughters" (in B. Ruby Rich's phrase) that attempts to enact the fantasies that the mother could not. As a melancholic romance in which the female object of desire is always lost, this trope is also presented as an alibi for Thornham's startling lack of consideration of lesbian cinema, or even the lesbian undertones of films such as *The Weight of Water* (a film that it's difficult to claim as feminist, not least since it repeats the motif of the unstable, killer lesbian).

Thornham's prefatory insistence that the



Female narratives: 'The Weight of Water'

films she examines, simply because they are made by women, "by their very nature... must engage with questions which have been of concern to feminist theorists" has been widely challenged. Recent feminist film scholarship (including Silverman's) has expanded both beyond the screen and deeper into it, taking up both phenomenology and political theories (from Deleuze to critical race theory) to connect the images on the screen to the situated bodies that produce and view them.

While Thornham's questions may be "irrecoverably feminist", her focus on fantasy and its narrative ramifications dis-locates the films from history, politics and lived experience, as well as from the ongoing narrative of feminist filmmaking and scholarship. S

## PORTRAITS/PORTRETY FRED DANIELS

By Nigel Arthur and Ewa Reeves, Fundacja Twarda Sztuka, 88pp, £19.99 (available from the National Portrait Gallery bookshop). ISBN 9788393043521

### Reviewed by Ian Christie

Considering how important publicity pictures have always been for cinema, it's surprising how little attention has been paid to the craft of enabling stars to shine off screen. Perhaps only Cornel Lucas is instantly recognisable as the master of glamorous portraiture. However,

a recent exhibition at the new London Film Museum in Covent Garden displayed the on-set work of various Magnum photographers; and this new book (accompanied by an event at London's National Portrait Gallery) focuses on the little-known Fred Daniels, who apparently served as a role model for the young Lucas.

Daniels was born in 1892, and although information about his early years is scant, he seems to have realised his artistic vocation in Paris, where the Scottish painter J.D. Fergusson introduced him to a circle that included the dancer Margaret Morris. In the mid-1920s Daniels photographed Morris posing al fresco in Isadora Duncan style, but his film career began at Elstree at the end of the decade with portraits of the stars of E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly*. As more international stars came to film in Britain during the 1930s, Daniels developed a growing reputation. Michael Powell later recalled him being the best of the freelance photographers at Elstree, and Nigel Arthur and Ewa Reeves's bilingual book focuses on the close relationship Daniels formed with Powell and Pressburger and their company The Archers over a decade.

Starting with the film that cemented their partnership, *49th Parallel* (1941), Daniels followed The Archers' films through to the disappointment of *The Elusive Pimpernel* (1950), which they had hoped to make as a Regency musical. A reminder of that project's potential is Daniels's fine study of David Niven which manages to convey both the Scarlet Pimpernel's resourcefulness and his Clark Kent-style cover as an overdressed fop.

All the Archers' key stars are here in characteristic poses – Roger Livesey, Anton Walbrook, Eric Portman, Deborah Kerr, Marius Goring – along with many of those who made only single or supporting appearances, including Jennifer Jones with co-starring fox in *Gone to Earth*.

Daniels's 1945 studio portraits of the filmmakers have become iconic: Michael Powell in visionary mode, looking through a glass negative or filter, and Emeric Pressburger in thoughtful profile. Daniels's own career was cut short by his sudden death in 1959, but the intimacy and directness of his portraiture lives on. S



Man of vision: Michael Powell, as shot by his favourite photographer, Fred Daniels

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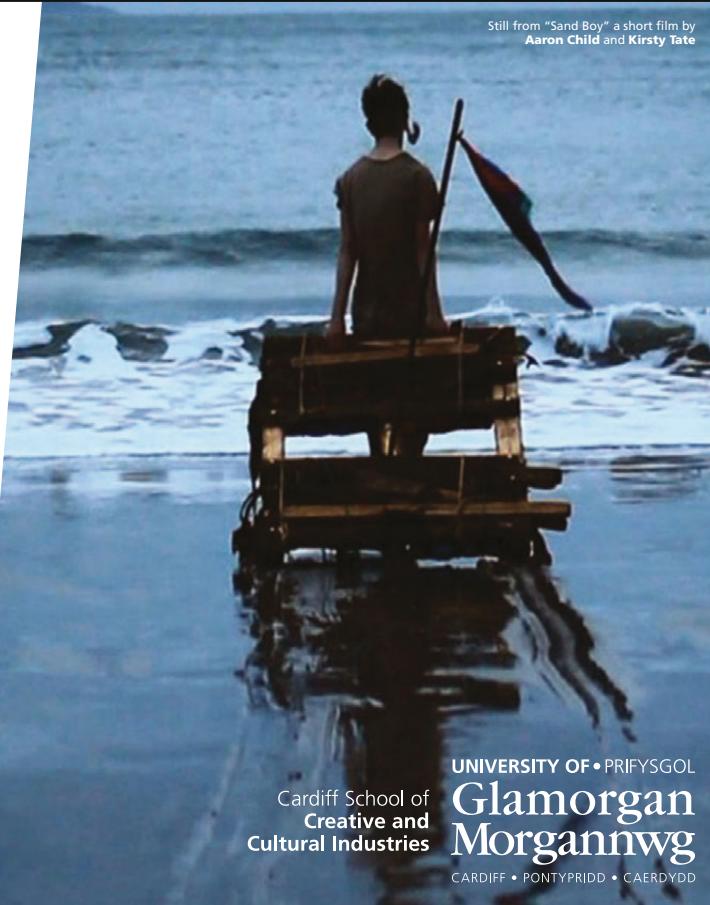
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# YEARNING



Takamine Hideko's face says it all in the closing moments of 1964's *Yearning* – a moving summation of the actress's work with Naruse

By James Bell

The freeze-frame on the face of 14-year-old Jean-Pierre Léaud at the end of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* may be the most famous final-shot close-up in cinema history, but for shocking registering of personal loss and lingering emotional resonance, my own vote would go to the unforgettable image of the great Japanese actress Takamine Hideko that closes Naruse Mikio's 1964 film *Yearning* (*Midareru*). Like Truffaut's close-up of Léaud's Antoine Doinel, or shots of Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, it's an image that seems to capture the soul of her character Reiko in a frozen moment, conveying an inexhaustible amount about her experiences, feelings and fears.

The ending of *Yearning* is unforgettable also because it stands as a summation of Naruse's abiding concern with the struggles faced by women. As the American critic Keith Uhlich notes in his insightful review of *Yearning* for *Slant Magazine*, it's an image that reverberates back across Naruse's entire oeuvre – not least because Reiko is played by Takamine. As Léaud was to Truffaut – or perhaps more aptly, as Hara Setsuko was to Ozu – Takamine, who started out as a child star and went on to become one of Japan's best-loved actresses, was indelibly associated with Naruse.

The first film of the director's she appeared in, at the age of 15, was *Hideko the Bus Conductress*

(*Hideko no shasho-san*, 1941). Their golden period, however, ran from the early 1950s to the mid-60s, with a run of masterful films including *Lightning* (*Inazuma*, 1952), *Floating Clouds* (*Ukigomo*, 1955), *Flowing* (*Nagareru*, 1956) and *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (*Onna ga kaidan o agaru toki*, 1960). *Yearning* was their penultimate collaboration, so Reiko is also something of a summation of all the characters the actress played for him.

Reiko is a war widow who has devoted the better years of her life to managing the small grocery store owned by her late husband's family. The store, like Reiko, is caught in the past; a new supermarket has opened on the same street, and is slowly pushing them out of business. Alongside her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Reiko also shares the house with her brooding brother-in-law Koji, who's prone to fights and passing flings – and who one day declares his love for her.

Shocked, Reiko is initially resistant, but Takamine's expressive face gradually registers flickers of excitement and pleasure at being desired again. Mindful of her dead husband, however, she sees no future in a relationship with Koji, and when the mother-in-law suggests that she leave the store, she decides it's time to go. It's at this point, with 20 minutes remaining, that this previously rather staid film

*The shocked expression on her face gives way to despair, then anger, then a numbed resignation*

hurtles towards its tragic finale with a soaring emotional intensity worthy of Douglas Sirk. On the train, Reiko sees that Koji has travelled with her, and simply by registering their exchange of glances – intercut with shots of the train speeding away from Tokyo, and the concerns that have held them back – Naruse suggests that a life together could be possible for them.

They disembark and head to an inn for the night, and Reiko tells Koji how happy it has made her to hear him declare his feelings. But later she tells him once again that she cannot be with him; Koji leaves, wearing a paper ring she has tied around his finger. Next morning Reiko is packing, ready to leave the inn, when she hears a commotion outside. A body is being carried along the towpath beside the river, and in a close-up we see from the paper ring on his finger that it is Koji.

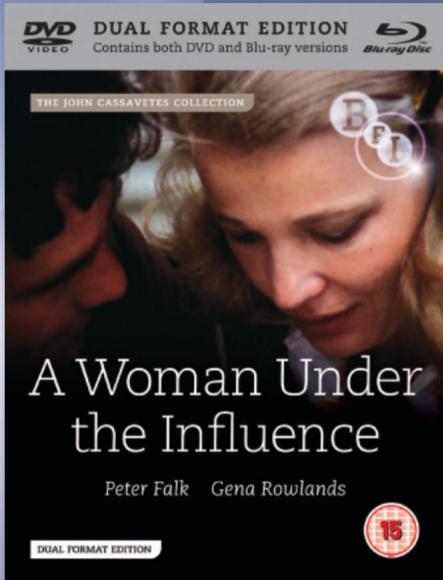
Naruse's films are usually remarkable for the way he captures conversations in adult and believable ways – he may be the best director of talking aside from Eric Rohmer. But here it's the unspoken that's most articulate, emotions coursing across Reiko's face as she runs, desperate to catch up with Koji's body.

At last she stops, gives up the chase and watches as he's carried away. Her breathing becomes less frantic and the shocked expression on her face gives way to despair, then anger, then a numbed resignation to the fact that she is again alone, and can partly blame herself.

No less a figure than Edward Yang, writing on Naruse for a retrospective at the San Sebastian Film Festival in 1998, described the moment as one of the most memorable and moving in all cinema – and he should know. **S**



# NEW RELEASES



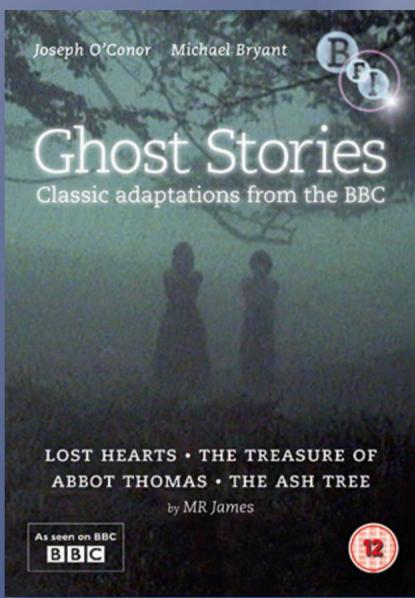
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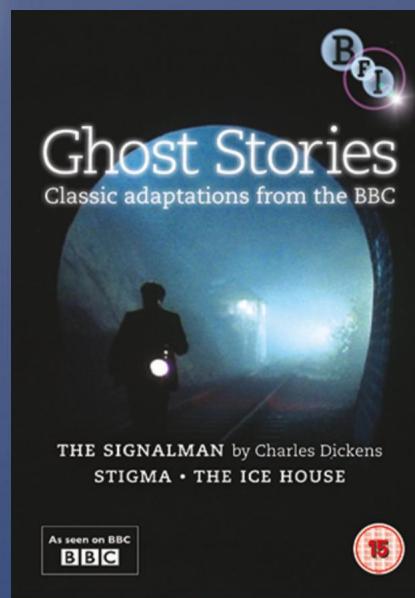
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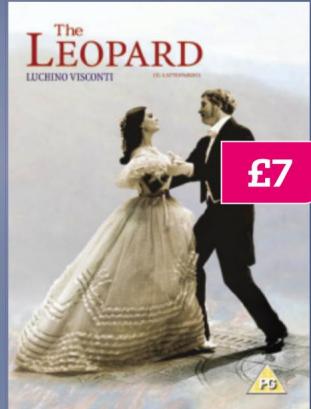
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